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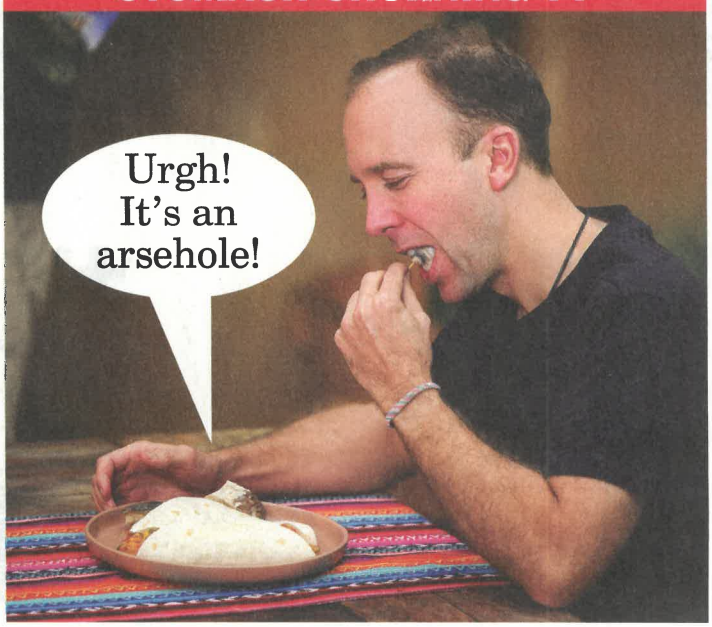

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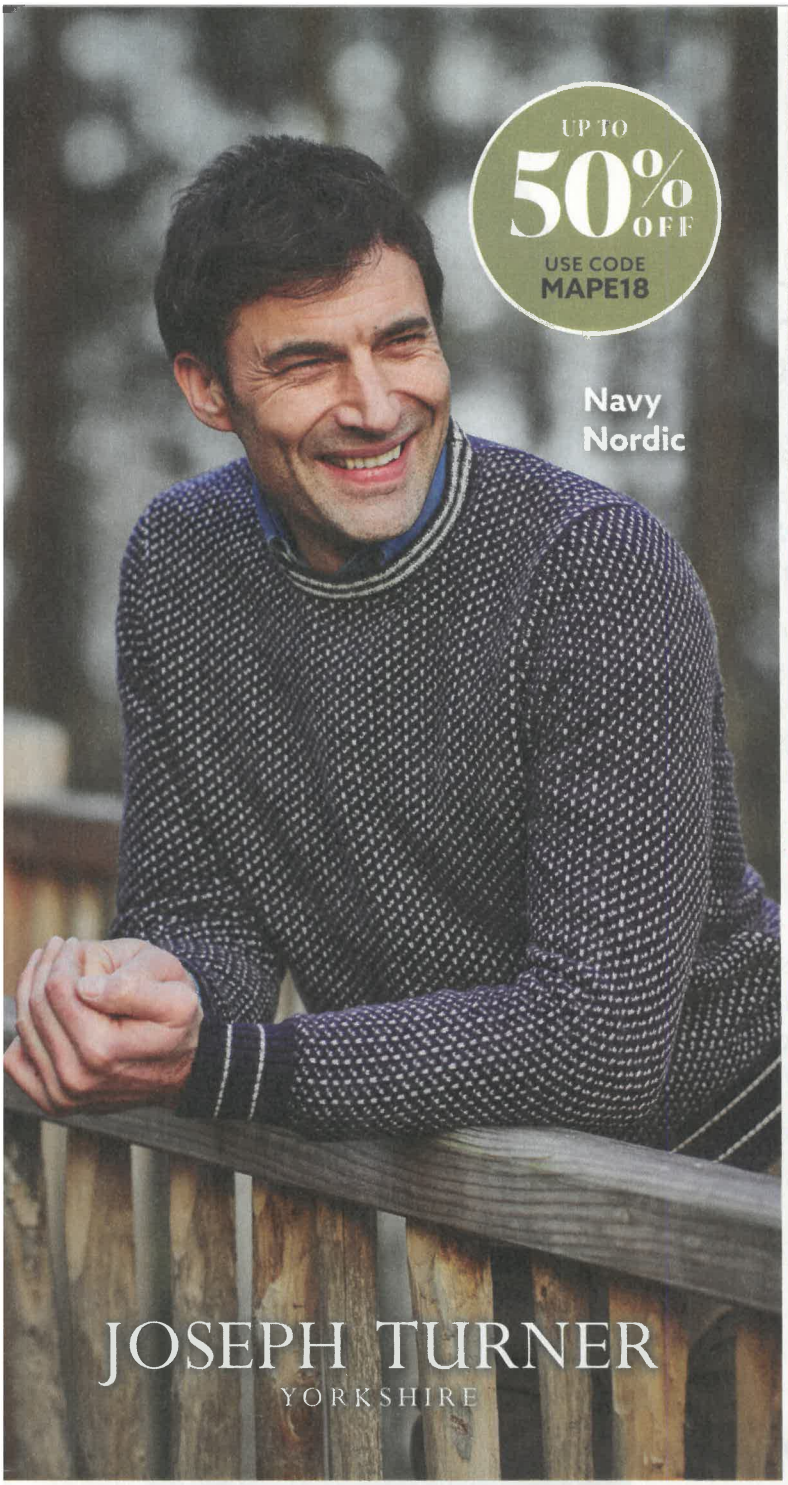

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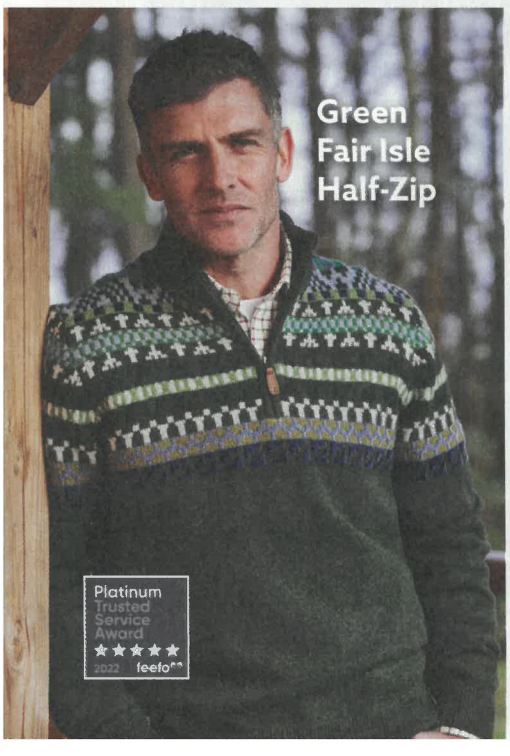

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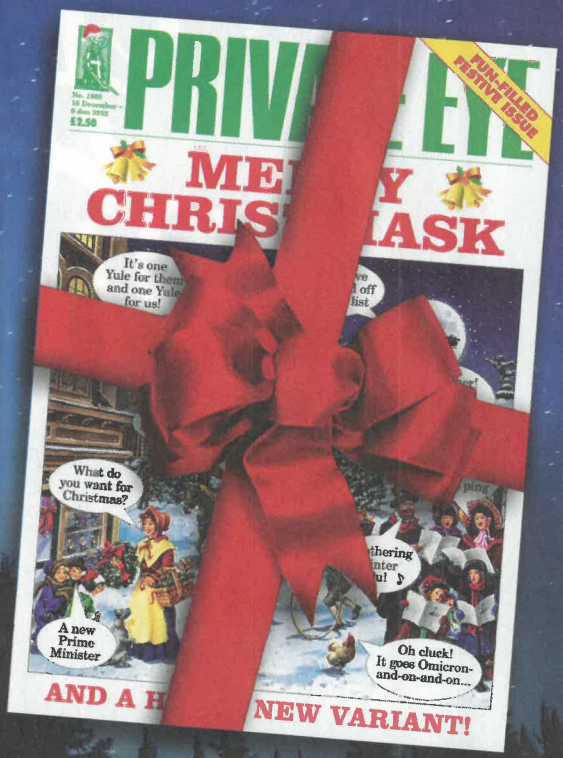
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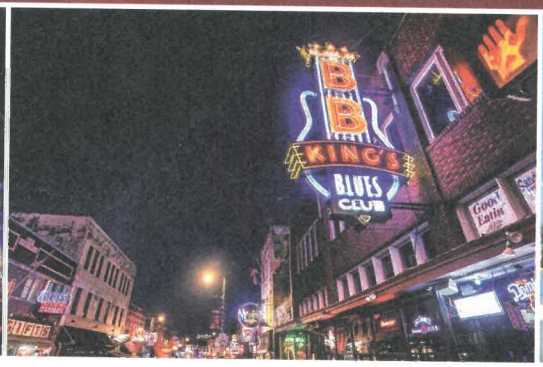

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BUNGLE BOOK

MATT HANCOCK's cringe-inducing appearance on ITV's *I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here!* has united both left and right in condemnation of him for taking a fat fee for self-promotion during a key period of the UK Covid-19 inquiry.

But one journalist has been defending jungle Matt: lobby veteran Isabel Oakeshott, who has a history of maverick journalistic practice (*Eyes passim*). Oakeshott told TalkTV's handful of viewers last week that Hancock would give a "great deal" of his reported £400,000 appearance fee to good causes (Hancock himself has only said he will be making a donation to charity).

But Oakeshott was just getting started. She brazenly added: "One thing I know for sure is that the top tax rate is still 45p, so we know perfectly well that he's going to be giving at least 45 percent of that to the state, so that's a form of charity in itself." Her fellow guests were united in disbelief at her reading of events.

By coincidence, Oakeshott has co-written Hancock's forthcoming diaries of the pandemic, which come out next month – and are likely to make higher royalties if the TV appearance is a success for Hancock.

The two are a strange pair. While Hancock drafted pandemic social distancing rules, Oakeshott was a self-styled "lockdown sceptic", playing down the severity of the virus. And she, like Hancock, was caught breaking lockdown rules: in June 2020 the *Guardian* reported that she attended a party with Tory MP Bob Seely when mixing between households was banned.

What might have convinced Hancock she would make a sympathetic co-writer, however, was Oakeshott's attitude to his exposure. She claimed to have been offered the CCTV footage of his office gropefest but rejected it because "it seemed vanishingly unlikely". Even after the health secretary 'fessed up, Oakeshott continued to insist that "this video of Matt Hancock appears to have been doctored".

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GAS-BAGSY

MUCH angst in green circles at the running of the COP27 climate jamboree being handled by Hill+Knowlton Strategies, a US PR firm whose client list includes oil & gas giants ExxonMobil, Shell, Chevron and Saudi Aramco, *writes Old Sparky*, and on whose behalf it is accused of "greenwashing".

Had protesters not noticed that COP27 host nation Egypt actively seeks to become a major producer and exporter of, er, natural gas? Like every country with large gas reserves it is responding enthusiastically at being wooed by importing countries recently cut off from their accustomed Russian supplies.

What will be the reaction if Egypt, with its hands on the COP27 drafting pen, comes up with a final conference communiqué that classifies fossil-fuel gas as "sustainable"? If it does, nobody should be surprised – the EU's own "green taxonomy" (see *Eye* 1567) does exactly that, too.

● *Keeping the lights on, p8*

SHARM EL-CHEEK

"I AM the spirit of Glasgow COP26," blustered Boris Johnson after inviting himself to COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh to support "the great common purpose of tackling man-made climate change".

While Johnson has talked a good game on climate change, as prime minister some of his more important acts were less than helpful. It was the Johnson government, with Rishi Sunak as chancellor, that cut overseas aid spending to 0.5 percent of national income, down from the internationally agreed target of 0.7 percent. This came soon after he had shut down the Department for International Development and folded its work into the Foreign Office.

The effect on the climate front was immediate. In 2020/21, aid spending directed at climate and the environment came to £331m; in 2021/22, it fell to £202m. As Johnson babbled on in Egypt about being a "foot soldier, a spear carrier" in the war on global warming, he forgot to mention this contribution from him when he had been a general with the power to do something.

KABULSHIT DEFLECTOR

THE Civil Service Awards are all about "celebrating excellence in government". So there was incredulity in parts of Whitehall when Border Force's National Operational Leadership Team was nominated in this year's "excellence in delivery" category for Operation Pitting.

The infamous operation launched the day before the Taliban took over Kabul, with the aim of evacuating British nationals and eligible Afghans. It ended two weeks later when all UK personnel, but not all eligible Afghans, had left Afghanistan.

A highly critical report by MPs on the foreign affairs select committee later noted that military and civil service staff on the ground had done their best in difficult circumstances, but Pitting's leadership was marked by failures from bureaucratic chaos, ministerial intervention and a lack of planning.

As the report said: "One whistleblower, a senior FCDO [Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office] official, told us that she had 'never in my career seen anything within the civil service so badly managed'." A year after the evacuation, the Refugee Council reported that almost 10,000 people who had fled Afghanistan for the UK were still living in unsuitable and unsafe hotel rooms. Trophies all round indeed.

CHANCELLOR'S AUTUMN STATEMENT

LESS IS MAUDE

CHANCELLOR Jeremy Hunt has followed one time-honoured Tory tradition and called in Lord (Francis) Maude for another "efficiency" review under chief secretary to the Treasury John Glen, reports the *Sunday Telegraph*. This doesn't say much about Maude's earlier efforts.

In the early days of the coalition, as minister in the Cabinet Office responsible for "efficiency and reform", Maude commissioned an efficiency review by Sir Philip Green. Soon after this he created the Crown Commercial Service (CCS), promising more efficient procurement but it was found by the National Audit Office not to have given value for money. It "rapidly ran into difficulties and soon had to reset its plans".

Among the CCS's more notable ideas was to employ Bill Crothers, now infamous as a double-jobber with dodgy finance company Greensill. Crothers and Maude would go on to work together at Francis Maude Associates (now trading as FMA), a consultancy created to cash in, largely in the Gulf, on Maude's supposed expertise in licking governments into shape.

This consultancy is bolstered by Maude's being able to boast to foreign potentates of leading yet more UK government reviews. In 2020 he was commissioned by the Johnson administration to look into "cross-cutting functions and the operation of spending controls". Then, this July, the then efficiency minister Jacob Rees-Mogg asked him to review "governance and accountability of the civil service". Whether the Hunt/Glen review will be folded into this in the interests of, er, efficiency is not clear. But as Hunt announces cuts in jobs and services, one spending commitment destined always to survive, it seems, is the Maude efficiency review.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

17% Pay rise demanded by Royal College of Nursing union, which government says is 'clearly not affordable', pointing out they are already on average of £34,000 a year

20% Rise in last year in NHS spending on agency nurses, who get up to £2,500 to fill a single shift because hospitals are so short-staffed

NHS RECOUNT

THE "good" news, *writes MD*, is that the NHS waiting list of 7.1m in fact refers to procedures and not to actual people.

When it comes to people, just, er, 5.5m citizens are awaiting treatment, with many of the sickest among them waiting for more than one procedure.

● *Failing the most vulnerable, p14*

AUTUMNAL STATEMENTS ■ **Newspapers' Crowning glories** 10 ■ **Grenfell fault lines** 15 ■ **EyeWorld in Africa** 16 ■ **Unfair game: The Agri Brigade** 17 ■ **(Han)cock tales: TVEye** 18 ■ **Bridges of sighs: Nooks** 22 ■ **FIFA's masses of Doha** 25 ■ **Mitie's migrant misery** 37 ■ **So. Farewell Lisa Osofsky** 41, 42

NEWS

PROFITS OF DOOM

ONE of the more controversial PPE suppliers, West Sussex-based Crisp Websites Ltd, which trades as Pestfix, has been forced to cough up around £70m after a legal dispute with the Department of Health and Social Care over defective PPE.

In May, *Eye* 1574 reported how Crisp Websites' mammoth profits over the first year of the pandemic had been all but wiped out by setting aside £72m for potential costs of a dispute with the DHSC over "quality issues over two contracts", which may or may not have been related to disclosures that £84m worth of supplies from the company were sitting in a pile marked "do not supply" (to healthcare services).

The *Eye* understands Crisp Websites has now handed over something like this figure in perhaps the first success for health department

negotiators over duff equipment and suspect contracts. But the win represents less than 3 percent of the £2.7bn the Commons public accounts committee had found to be "at risk" on disputed deals.

The department has refused the *Eye*'s freedom of information request for a breakdown of cases and amounts at stake at the various stages of negotiation and litigation, as the information could cause "reputational damage and commercial disadvantage to the supplier".

It's nice to know that it *is* possible to claw back money spent on useless PPE. How much more of the remaining billions they can we expect to get back? In the meantime, both the DHSC and Pestfix declined to comment on the story.

EYE TOLD YOU SO...

AS foreseen in *Eye* 1524, charity watchdogs have lambasted Christ Church, Oxford, for spending more than £6.6m on legal and PR fees to oust the dean, the Very Rev Prof Martyn Percy, and reporting the costs as "teaching, research and residential expenditure" in its accounts.

The college, a registered charity, spent the funds between 2018 and January 2022, including paying for a costly tribunal chaired by retired high court judge Sir Andrew Smith – which fully exonerated Percy, dismissing all 27 complaints against him (*Eyes passim*).

The college accounts said not a word about the tribunal, or the legal costs – but there was a sharp rise in teaching, research and residential spending. When asked by the *Eye* in June 2020 whether this was where the legal costs were lurking, answer came there none.

The Charity Commission's official warning statement confirms this was indeed how the legal costs were reported and "this has the potential to mislead." The trustees were also told off for failing to set a budget limit on spending on the dispute, noting that £5.3m of the £6.6m was approved after it had been spent.

"We consider that the actions of the trustees at Christ Church amount to mismanagement and/or misconduct," says the Charity Commission's Helen Earner. The college must now review its governance and ensure its 2022 accounts are in proper order – or the trustees will face further regulatory action.

UK nuclear warhead maintenance staff to vote on strikes

SkyNews

KEEPING THE LIGHTS ON

Hidden Ofgem

WITH Putin's gas turned off, France's nukes suffering from corrosion and strikes, and power cuts a real possibility, nobody could argue against energy regulator Ofgem focusing on getting us all through the coming cold weather.

Its "winter prioritisation" programme inevitably means work on some of its other responsibilities being suspended. But these suspensions are more extensive than they might have been, due to the effects of CEO Jonathan Brearley's "organisational transformation" (*Eye* 1585). As foreseen, these are undermining Ofgem's effectiveness, even as Chris O'Connor, the consultant taken on to run this costly project (at a salary much greater than Brearley's) has left after only a year.

Annual staff turnover is running at a debilitating 25 percent – the worst of any UK regulator. Particularly depleted are the specialist staff who ensure the cyber security and resilience of Ofgem itself and all the critical electricity and gas infrastructure operators under its authority. This vital work is on the winter "pause" list, even though energy infrastructure is some of the most vulnerable to malicious attack, and Russia is currently waging economic, and reportedly cyber, warfare on Europe.

Also on the 42-item prioritisation hit list are "enforcement casework" (what use is a regulator that doesn't enforce the rules?) and work on competition policy (in a sector where anti-competitive practices have been notorious). Strangely, several workstreams of Brearley's organisational transformation vanity project survive as they are "essential".

As the last *Eye* noted, severe and long-lasting problems can arise when Ofgem takes its eye off the ball. How ironic, then, that another activity facing suspension this winter is "development of a corporate risk tool". What could possibly go wrong!

Grid and bear it

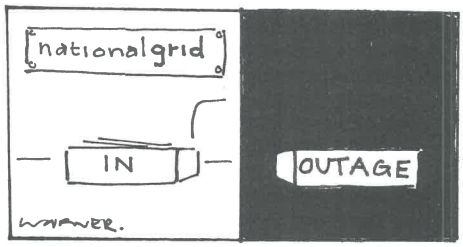
DESPITE the reluctance of UK politicians to talk about energy rationing and potential blackouts, the National Grid is finally admitting it may need to impose selective early-evening power cuts if things go badly this winter.

The need for these cuts would be lessened if consumers reduced their demand in a meaningful way. This is starting to happen, but there's a lot more scope – as illustrated by the numbers for last month. UK electricity demand fell by around 2.5 percent vs last year, but October was very warm (and gas demand fell by even more). It was equally warm in the rest of Europe, though – and there electricity demand fell by 10 percent. The numbers are not quite comparable because in France, for example, more electricity is used for heating than here; but it still suggests our neighbours are switching off more than we are.

Why? Because their governments are actively pressing them to do so, via rousing speeches by political leaders, TV campaigns and information broadcasts. To be fair, they are mostly in a worse position than the UK because of historical energy policy mistakes, and in France's case the chronic state of its nuclear industry, operating at only 50 percent right now. Still, none of us is comfortably placed for a serious cold spell this winter.

Peak practice

A 10 PERCENT reduction in energy usage is a big deal for the energy system, particularly at times of peak demand around 6pm – and for many consumers it's quite feasible, even if there's no single prescription. Though the UK government is unwilling to run a European-style energy-saving campaign, newspapers and TV programmes are full of helpful hints, and Old Sparky is happy to pitch in too.



Perhaps the biggest and simplest piece of advice is: turning down the thermostat is genuinely very effective! Although it's an over-simplification, that magic 10 percent reduction can roughly be equated to just one degree less on the thermostat; medical advice is that healthy adults can be comfortable and safe at 18°C. And turning down the boiler itself doesn't affect the steady temperature in the home; it reduces energy use, makes the whole system more efficient, and just takes longer to warm up. But read the manual carefully: every system has a safe minimum which should be strictly observed.

For taxpayers, the saving is twofold: as well as your energy bill coming down, so too does the charge on the government's vast winter subsidy scheme, which taxpayers finance.

Switching hour

WHAT about getting paid to switch off? Many people will have heard of a new National Grid scheme to do just this (via energy suppliers), but as it's experimental, very few will have been invited to participate.

The potential for reducing peak demand is theoretically large and would bring disproportionate benefits to the operation of the grid and avoidance of power cuts. So it's a welcome experiment, and arguably long overdue. But it's likely to prove difficult to operate.

Its main value this winter will be to enable the grid and suppliers to address the detailed practicalities and determine what the real potential is. If this turns out to be encouraging, the true value will be felt in subsequent winters when it could be implemented on a larger scale. That would be handy, because very warm Octobers won't happen every year. The market price for energy to be delivered in winter 2023-24 is already at record highs.

Perish pump

POWER cuts are always damaging, but a new class of problem is looming: the impact on owners of heat pumps, which we shall all be more or less forced to adopt, if and when the threat to ban gas boilers is implemented.

Heat pumps need to be permanently powered by electricity. With most common designs, if they lose power they need careful restarting, with a warming-up delay of several hours before they can safely be used again. Any attempt to get them back on heating duty sooner will cause damage. But households dependent on the pumps for heating will be strongly inclined to do just that after, say, a three-hour winter blackout.

Thus far, the UK is among the European countries with the fewest heat pumps, and warnings like this are not widely known here. If we do indeed suffer blackouts this winter, the pioneering owners of heat pumps may find themselves guinea pigs for problems we've not yet been told about.

'Old Sparky'

Street Of Shame

MAIL MORAL MAZE

THE *Daily Mail* and *Mail on Sunday* have led the way in condemning David Beckham for hypocrisy over his deal to be the face of the Qatar World Cup. "Why has Beckham turned a blind eye to racism, misogyny and homophobia in Qatar – could it be his secret £10m deal to plug its World Cup?" was one typical piece from 2021.

The titles have kept up the barrage in recent weeks, with stories including the revelation that a woman who acted as Beckham's translator said that being gay was "against human nature", and condemnation from gay magazine *Attitude*. The *MoS* also tackled singer Robbie Williams who is due to give a concert during the competition.

The *Mail* itself of course would never dream of doing business with Qatar. Or would it? In 2017, dmg events, the events arm of *Mail* publisher DMGT, which runs business conferences around the world, opened an office in Doha, Qatar. "Establishing a presence in Qatar is an important strategic move for us," said Matt Denton, president of dmg events Middle East, Asia & Africa. "It brings with it access to a market of significant potential, as the country's preparations for the FIFA World Cup 2022 continue apace. We also have the honour of being the first events company to establish itself in Qatar."

The office seems to have gone from strength to strength, organising events in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Qatar itself. This year, it signed a partnership with a Qatar-based firm to run two big expos: The Big 5 Construct Qatar and INDEX Design Qatar, both in 2023. Perhaps David Beckham can be persuaded to put in an appearance.

CREDIBILITY GULF

"THE Qatar World Cup is immoral and weird," declared the *New Statesman* last month. "It is an abomination that this tournament is taking place."

Jonathan Liew, however, concluded his piece on a thoughtful note: "We're not really angry at some tiny distant enclave in the Gulf, but at ourselves. At the way we allowed this malign, cannibalistic tyranny to embed itself in our institutions, our cities and towns, our politics and our monarchy, our favourite sport."

And, er, in the *New Statesman*, which in 2018 ran an article by the Qatari ambassador to the UK at the time, Yousef Al-Khater, about the embargo put on the nation by its neighbours, declaring that "partnership with Britain will be key" to overcoming it.

Qatar is far from the only repressive regime the New Statesman Media Group is happy to embed with. In the same month that Liew's article ran, sister outlet *Press Gazette* was running sponsored content from TwoFour54, a United Arab Emirates government-owned media project trying to encourage news outlets to relocate to its swanky tax-free campus in Abu Dhabi.

Like Qatar, the UAE outlaws homosexuality, uses illegal detentions and allows the mistreatment of migrant workers in a system that has been compared to human trafficking. The TwoFour54 campus itself is on Abu Dhabi's Yas Island, where more than a decade of breakneck construction projects resulted in thousands of migrant workers suffering in dire conditions.

LEBEDEVS ON THE MOVE

FORMER KGB agent Alexander Lebedev resigned from the last of the family's newspaper businesses, Independent Print Ltd, in May, just days after he was sanctioned by Canada over the Russian invasion of Ukraine. But a recent lavish holiday to a Saudi Arabian resort that has been heavily plugged by the *Independent* and *Evening Standard* suggests he still retains a close connection to his media businesses.

The oligarch, who bought the two papers more than a decade ago, took his second wife Lena and their four children on a no-expense-spared holiday to AlUla in north-western Saudi Arabia last month. Pictures on Lena's Instagram account show the family flying in a private jet and trying out a range of desert activities.

By coincidence, AlUla has had a vast amount of coverage in the *Standard* and *Independent* over the past few years, with dedicated sections on both websites. One piece in the *Indy* gushed: "There are lots of amazing things about AlUla. Perhaps the most amazing is, how few people have heard of it."

It's far from the first link the Lebedevs have forged with the Gulf state, despite its dubious human rights record and rather direct methods of dealing with critical journalists such as Jamal Khashoggi. Evgeny hosted leader Mohammed bin Salman for dinner in 2018 and has joined the board of a non-profit created by the Saudi government to research anti-ageing – possibly to share with them the secret of how he prevents grey hairs from intruding on Britain's greatest beard. Most significantly, 30 percent stakes in both papers were sold to Saudi businessman Sultan Mohamed Abuljadayel just under five years ago, resulting in the British government directly linking both companies to the Saudi state.

After leaving AlUla by private jet, Alexander's family next popped up in Moscow, where Lena showcased an exciting new buttock massage treatment on Instagram. Such a jaunt, in the week Russian troops were withdrawing from Kherson, throws an in interesting light on Evgeny's efforts to distance himself from Russia after the invasion. In a front-page declaration in the Standard, he spluttered that speculation about his connections to the Russian state was "farcical".

With losses at both titles growing and the ongoing failure to appoint a permanent editor for either paper, speculation is growing among hacks about the family's future intentions for the titles. Something is definitely being planned: last month Evgeny quietly set up an entirely new holding company, Sovereign Media, in which he is the sole shareholder and director, based at the paper's new offices in Finsbury Square. With characteristic focus on what's really important, he decided within a fortnight that he didn't like the name and changed it to Sovereignty Media instead.

AGENDA BENDING

THERE were red faces all round at the *Telegraph* when in 2018 it reported the worst gender pay gap of any UK newspaper publisher, and it emerged that female staff were being paid an average 35 percent less per hour than male colleagues. What to do?

Bosses at the media group quickly announced introduction of equal parental pay for male staff who were thereafter entitled to 26 weeks full paid paternity leave, all part of the company's "commitment to a zero gender pay gap by 2025". The pay gap figures did rally slightly over time and this year the average hourly pay gap was just, er, 26.1 percent.

Next year is set to look equally dismal, not least because several highly-paid female recruits from *Grazia* magazine departed earlier this year, including the *Daily Telegraph*'s deputy editor Jane Bruton, and the *Sunday Telegraph*'s *Stella* editor Marianne Jones. Still, at least the new paternity leave policy is up and running and has recently been taken up by several male executives, including the daily paper's head of news Mark Hughes and production boss Laurie Allsopp.

One female staff member tells the *Eye* it has not gone unnoticed how the gender equality policy has benefited male colleagues. They also noted that while women with babies to feed and raise take their parental leave in one stretch – with potentially damaging consequences for career progression – some of their male counterparts have chosen to split their paternity leave into holiday-sized chunks. This allows them to limit career-damage while enjoying the benefits of the leave. Hurrah for gender equality!

HYSTERIA REPEATING

"THANKS to the internet, and in particular social media, we are besieged from dawn till nightfall by predictions of disaster," complains Dominic Sandbrook in one of his trademark essays for the *Daily Mail*.

"Venture online, and within moments you find yourself reading about some new (and often entirely confected) Government scandal, or some terrible new disaster a thousand miles away, or some appalling new outrage that will surely bring society crashing down. We live, in other words, in an age of hysteria..."

In fact one doesn't have to go online at all to be rendered hysterical with fear: just pick up a copy of the *Daily Mail* newspaper, any day of the week. As *Eye* 1581 noted, dire warnings of a "food apocalypse" and a "triple threat of heatwave, fire and drought" are staple fayre; and there's been no let-up in the hysteria since.

Recent weeks have brought us: "Perfect storm as lenders pull mortgages and sales collapse"; "The day death rained from the sky"; "Pensions timebomb may finally be about to explode"; "Channel migrant crisis out of control"; "How General Armageddon built his career on a mountain of corpses"; "We're fighting a war for civilisation, and Putin's message to the West? You're next"; not to mention the cheery "Somebody's going to die."

O·B·N

"Every single Adrian Chiles column is a corker, without exception. It's a miserable, mean world out there, but his writing is a little ray of sunshine."

***Guardian* columnist OWEN JONES, 3 November, tweeting about *Guardian* writer Adrian Chiles, new husband of *Guardian* editor Kath Viner**

More Street of Shame over ☞

HACKWATCH

Crowning glories

ONE thing almost all papers agree on about the new series of *The Crown* on Netflix, covering the royal family's chaotic 1990s, is that – to coin a phrase – it really is *appalling*. During the relevant period, of course, the papers themselves behaved impeccably…

The Sun **NOW 9 October**: "Netflix is to show Prince Philip pursuing an affair in *The Crown* — just weeks after the Queen's funeral. He will be shown in intimate scenes with close pal Penny Knatchbull." Two days later, Ingrid Seward calls this "tedious titillation… there's no doubt in my mind, I'm certain she was never his mistress".

THEN In 1996, the *Sun* broke the story of what it called "the Dukegate tapes" – having snapped up the tape of a private phone call between Philip and Knatchbull, recorded by amateur radio operator Neville Hawkins, and covered the story with accompanying nudge-nudge headlines. After running a "find that lady" competition to find out the identify of "Prince Philip's posh woman telephone pal", they slobber that "Philip – notorious in public for his curt and sometimes rude manner – has privately been an endless source of support to the beautiful aristocrat."

NOW 16 October: "The fifth series of the royal drama, which starts on November 9, dredges up embarrassing and painful events from 1990 to 1997. But it also adds in events which are based on conspiracy theories, wild claims or pure imagination."

THEN In 1996, the *Sun* ran stills from a video purportedly of Princess Diana and her lover James Hewitt, headlined "DI SPY VIDEO SCANDAL", of the pair having a "bra and pants romp". The video turns out to be a fake made with lookalikes: the *Sun* claimed it had been the victim of a "sophisticated hoax".

Mail **NOW** The *Mail* commissions Robert Hardman to watch the series, and he calls it a "catalogue of tasteless distortions, errors and, at times, curated malevolence masquerading as quality drama." The paper also reports the king's friends calling one storyline a "hurtful smear", John Major saying it's "malicious nonsense" and Malcolm Rifkind that it's "pure fantasy".

THEN In 1997, after Diana's death, the paper ran a photo of Charles out walking with the highly speculative headline "CHARLES WEEPS BITTER TEARS OF GUILT", claiming that "Bleary-eyed Charles walked the moors, asking, why, why, why?" How's that for pure fantasy?

Mirror **NOW 22 October**: "The Crown has been met with backlash over claims that some scenes are the work of complete fiction."

THEN On 9 August 1997, the *Daily Mirror* splashed with a picture of Diana and Dodi Fayed together, apparently about to kiss. In fact, the picture was fake: Dodi's head had been photoshopped to face in the opposite direction so it looked like the couple were heading for an embrace. Editor Piers "Morgan" Moron happily confessed to the fiction: "I raced to my newsroom: 'Get those photos of Di and Dodi from yesterday and turn his head round… We just need to flip his head round and it will look like he's kissing her'."

NOW 2 November: "*The Crown* will reportedly tackle the 'Tampongate' scandal involving King Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles…" The *Mirror* runs a detailed piece explaining the incident, in which a phone call between Charles and Camilla where he fantasised about being reincarnated as a tampon was leaked to the press. They quote Dominic West, who plays Charles, saying: "What's really [clear now] is how invasive and disgusting was the press's attention to it, that they printed it out verbatim."

THEN It was, er, the *Daily Mirror* that first gleefully quoted from the Tampongate tape in November 1992, and the *Sunday Mirror* which printed a full transcript the following January. Then-*Mirror* editor Richard Stott chortled in his autobiography that: "It's not every day you have the chance to bring down the British monarchy."

EXPRESS **NOW 23 October**: An unnamed "close friend" of the royal family tells the *Express*: "I'm horrified by what is going on with Netflix and how they are vilifying the royal family. It is vicious."

THEN For an entire decade after Diana's death, the *Express* ran headlines such as "Al Fayed: Prince Philip and Blair ordered murder", repeating verbatim the baseless claims of Dodi Fayed's dad, a key character in the new series, that Di was done in.

● *See Windsor Soap, p18*

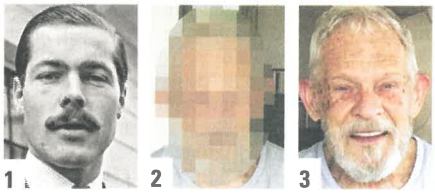
WELL, WELL, WELL...

THE *Times* wasn't impressed by reports that civil service departments have spent "almost half a million pounds on wellness apps" for staff.

"Since 2020 the Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs [*sic*] has spent £266,100 on staff access to Headspace, an app designed by a Buddhist monk from Bristol," spluttered a piece on 7 November. "Subscriptions to Headspace were also bought by the Department for Education and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport." Irate Tory MP Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown was quoted as harrumphing: "I don't see why the employer should be paying for these services."

What kind of wishy-washy employer would do such a thing? Well, News UK, owner of the *Times*, for one. "Wellbeing is the foundation of our working lives, and it's important to us that our people have the support they need," intones their careers website. "We offer access to support and counselling… [and] all of our people can use the meditation app Headspace."

NON-LUCANLIKE



1 Lord Lucan, pictured before his disappearance in 1974

2 Man in Australia, as pictured in the *Daily Mirror*, which claimed he was an "exact match for Lucan… This isn't an opinion, it's science and mathematical fact" on 7 Nov 2022

3 Same photograph, unpixellated, as run in the *Daily Telegraph* on 8 Nov 2022

4 Another exclusive in the *Daily Mirror* revealing that the same man in Australia definitely isn't Lord Lucan, 25 July 2021

SMALLS PRINT

NEWS that Wimbledon will no longer insist female players wear white underwear naturally required illustrative photos in a spirit of public service.

Most titles were careful, though, to avoid the kind of shots known to the grubbier snappers as "upskirt", and instead typically offered pics giving discreet glimpses of red under-shorts as worn at other tournaments, or simply showing Serena Williams in action (the *Express* eccentrically chose to focus on bras, not knickers – the old rule "forced some women to play braless", it claimed).

Only the *Mail* and the *Telegraph*, with photos of Emma Raducanu and Heather Watson, felt a need to give their readers frontal reminders of what white underwear looks like. This was surprising in the *Telegraph*'s case, as it publishes an award-winning *Telegraph Women's Sport* supplement and boasts about its commitment to feminist pledges in transforming its sport coverage. What will *TWS* columnists like Judy Murray have made of this reversion to its bad old ways?

THE *Daily Mail* had a shocking headline for its readers on 29 October. "'My husband beat me so hard with his shark-bone walking stick that I was left deaf in one ear': Princess Margaret's lady-in-waiting Anne Glenconner reveals for the first time the violence that scarred her 50-year marriage."

Lady Glenconner's account of life with her husband Colin was harrowing, but *Mail* readers may have been forgiven a touch of *déjà vu* because it wasn't being revealed for "the first time". And where might *Mail* readers have seen it? Why in the *Mail* – specifically on Richard Eden's "Eden Confidential" page, which ran a headline in January: "Party-loving Lord Glenconner was a brutal wife-beater who attacked me so badly I was left deaf in one ear, says his widow."

The story itself was ripped off from an interview Lady Glenconner had conducted with the *Financial Times*, so it wasn't even a *Mail* exclusive the last time round. But memories clearly run short at the paper these days.

RUPERT'S NEW FRIENDS

TURBULENCE on the other side of the Atlantic last week as the supertanker that is Rupert Murdoch made a sharp turn to port.

The disappointing results for Trumpian Republicans in the mid-terms were greeted by a *New York Post* front page depicting the ex-president as "Trumpty Dumpty" and a *Wall Street Journal* editorial dubbing him "the Republican Party's biggest loser". Even Fox News has begun allowing some guarded criticism of Trump. But is a similar, albeit more cautious, manoeuvre occurring closer to home?

The *Sun* didn't back any candidate in the recent Conservative leadership campaigns, which leaves it free to take a critical view of Rishi Sunak's government in a way that will be far harder for the *Times*, which employs the PM's best man as a political commentator. This will be a useful strategy until Rupert decides who is definitely going to win the 2024 election and throws his weight behind them to be able to claim it was the *Sun* wot won it.

But ferrets are already being put in position to reverse. Last weekend saw the *Sun on Sunday* award an op-ed column to chancellor Jeremy Hunt to rattle out platitudes on how painful this week's budget is likely to be for readers. So far so standard. But beneath it, Labour's shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves was given a footnote slot to explain why everything Hunt said was nonsense and lay out how Labour would sort out the mess.

COURT CIRCULAR

LAST month a bird strike on a BA flight from Bangalore to Heathrow risked making Camilla the shortest-reigning Queen Consort, beating the record of 154 days set by Yolande de Dreux in 1286.

Camilla had been staying at a health spa – something royal hacks had been told not to report. They fear being cast into outer darkness by the palace media team if they dare to do some actual journalism. India's media had also been warned off reporting her presence. She has visited before, sometimes with Brian, but the palace was very sensitive about this particular trip.

It's partly because of complementary medicine itself. The king and queen must champion the NHS (even if they do go private), which has no time for such treatments. But the palace also wants to duck questions about Camilla's ability to deal with the demands of queenship because of her health.

Since they married, royal tours, particularly long haul, have involved elaborate planning to deal with Camilla's travel sickness. She tried to avoid the 2018 Commonwealth Games on Australia's Gold Coast, and the eventual journey out took three days to allow for generous stopovers. She then stayed only three days before leaving Brian to finish a long tour solo. The couple routinely arrive a day or two early for tours so she can recover privately – something that is never reported.

This is not ideal when your husband's kingdoms still (for now) span the globe. That she was somehow able to manage a ten-hour flight for some holistic therapy in India, rather than choosing a home-based spa, would never have been known had the bird not sacrificed itself. Hacks, who were unable to ignore that story, reported it without asking questions.

'Flunkey'

LEGAL NEWS

Carter-Spart?

WITHIN 24 hours of Shaima Dallali being dismissed as president of the National Union of Students after an investigation into allegations of antisemitism found "serious breaches of NUS policies", a strongly worded press release had been put out on her behalf.

"Shaima Dallali has today announced that she is considering all available legal remedies following her summary dismissal from her role as President of the NUS," it declared. "Ms Dallali rejects the findings of the disciplinary panel… she considers the process to have constituted – and that it continues to constitute – discriminatory treatment of her as a black Muslim woman and her beliefs concerning the plight of the Palestinian people."

Was Dallali, who completed a masters in law and Bar practice course at City, University of London in 2020, planning to represent herself? Er, no. The press release itself was issued by none other than Carter-Fuck, the eye-wateringly (and in the past *Eye*-torturingly) expensive solicitors who boast of their "unrivalled expertise in reputation management, defamation, privacy and other media law".

Dallali is at least the second NUS figure to have their PR and legal needs met by Carter-Fuck in recent years: in 2018 the union's trans officer Jess Bradley was suspended over flashing allegations and instructed Carter-Fuck to try to prevent press coverage on privacy grounds (*Eye* 1476).

"There's no way most students would be able to afford Carter-Ruck's fees," points out a bemused legal acquaintance of the *Eye*. "I would say there's definitely a conditional fee agreement in place, but it's possible Dallali has someone funding the claim – or that the firm have taken a view that it's worth getting involved because the case would be high-profile."

There is, of course, another explanation: that Carter-Fuck is acting on a point of principle (*What??? Ed.*). There certainly seems to be a theme in some of the cases it's choosing to take on these days.

In October 2021, the firm announced in another pompous press release that it was representing Corbynite apparatchiks Seumas Milne, Karie Murphy, Laura Murray and two of their colleagues as they "strenuously denied" the Labour party's finding that they had been involved in the leak of a confidential report into how antisemitism was dealt with by the party under Jeremy Corbyn.

This came after several years serving as the retained attack dog of Len McCluskey's Unite union (*Eye* 1556); and this August, shortly after Corbynite MP Sam Tarry was sacked as a frontbencher by Keir Starmer for giving interviews on a picket line, Carter-Fuck announced it would be acting on his behalf in a (failed) attempt to halt the process that ended with his deselection as Labour candidate for Ilford South (*see HP Sauce, p13*).

Peter Carter-Fuck, who founded the firm in 1981, was a staunch Conservative for most of his life. Perhaps, after celebrating its 40th birthday last year, his eponymous creation is bucking tradition by becoming more left-wing in middle age!

REVERSE FERRETS: THE US EDITION

"It looks increasingly as if Biden's Democrats will take a beating worthy of a disaster movie. Republicans seem certain to take control of the House with big gains. The outcome in the Senate – currently split 50-50… has until recently looked uncertain. In the past week, polls suggest a potentially decisive shift to the Republicans there too… This feels terminal for Biden. His approval ratings are in the tank and the doubts about his fitness for office are larger than ever… after Tuesday's likely heavy defeat, the mood will change and the dam will break."
– Gerard Baker predicts US midterm election results in the* Times, *3 November

"Something happened on the way to the landslide. There was no big swing. The red wave barely trickled ashore…" ***– Prescient Baker is given a spread in the* Times, *12 November***

"Joe Biden is heading for a brutal wake-up call in tomorrow's US mid-term elections… While fixating on voting rights and abortion, Sleepy Joe forgot about rising crime and gas prices. Now he's the one paying the price."
– Sun *editorial, 7 November*

"Certain Republicans had a plan for what was meant to happen now. Had there been a clean sweep of Republican victories, Donald J Trump would have taken the credit… But the red wave didn't happen. At best there was a red trickle. Donald's big bet seems not to have worked." **– Sun *columnist Douglas Murray, 10 Nov***

Football terminology:

Dribbling

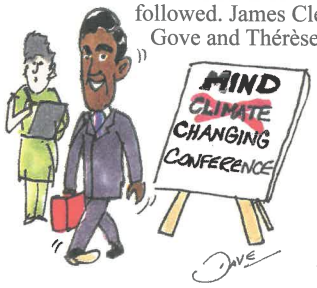
"It's not a mirage! They really are holding the World Cup here"

ENGLAND MAKE A STAND

BENCH WARMERS

CABINET ministers would normally stay on the front bench for a Commons statement by the prime minister. Not so when Rishi Sunak, after PMQs, rose to make a statement about COP27 and climate-change policies. So important is this issue to top Tories that there was a stampede for the exits.

Kemi Badenoch was first to leave. Dominic Raab and Suella Braverman soon followed. James Cleverly, Michael Gove and Thérèse Coffey melted away. In the end the only one left was Penny Mordaunt, looking trapped amid a sprinkling of junior ministers.



BULLY BEEFS

ONE day before Gavin Williamson finally resigned over bullying allegations, Nick Timothy, Theresa May's former chief of staff turned *Telegraph* columnist, defended the then minister without portfolio on Twitter.

"There are good reasons why all but one prime minister since 2010 has wanted him at their side," argued Timothy, citing Williamson's "excellent" work as a whip for May and qualities as "a shrewd tactician" and "judge of character". Timothy claimed "people gunning for GW are in fact gunning for Rishi", adding: "Rishi presumably appointed GW because he values the political skills he brings to the table. He shouldn't buckle just because it's this week's story to try to get Williamson fired."

Is one bully sticking up for another? According to Tim Shipman's 2017 book *Fall Out*, Timothy and fellow chief of staff Fiona Hill would refer to chancellor Philip Hammond as "the cunt" – upon hearing which, Hammond quietly remarked: "That's nice, isn't it?" One witness to Timothy's meetings with Hammond said the chancellor was "treated in front of his senior officials with utter contempt"; another said Timothy "would talk down to him like he was a subordinate rather than chancellor of the exchequer".

Following the Tories' poor performance at the 2017 general election, May's former aide Katie Perrior called for Timothy and Hill, aka "the terrible twins", to be sacked. She lambasted them in the *Times*, thundering: "Working in No 10, I was staggered by the arrogance of Nick Timothy and Fiona Hill." They acted towards cabinet ministers in a "rude, abusive, childish" manner: "For two people who have never achieved elected office, I was staggered at the disrespect they showed on a daily basis."

Perrior was not the only one calling for the terrible twins' departure. One minister told Shipman: "The party will not swallow Nick and Fi any more. Serious people are saying in numbers that they have to go." Then housing secretary Sajid Javid reportedly "made it absolutely clear" to May that if Timothy was not forced out "it wasn't just that he wouldn't serve her in government, there would be serious trouble". And that was that for Timothy's spell in Downing Street. What a political mastermind!

NUMBER CRUNCHING

34 months Time Gavin Williamson lasted in Theresa May's government before being sacked in disgrace

26 months Time Gavin Williamson lasted in Boris Johnson's government before being sacked in disgrace (and then knighted)

14 days Time Gavin Williamson lasted in Rishi Sunak's government before having to resign in disgrace

WHAT A RACKET...

THE list of Boris Johnson's resignation honours is now with the Lords' committee, and leaks have revealed some of the names who've made it on.

Some papers have reported on the remarkable youth of a few of his choices for life peerages, such as former spads Charlotte Owen and Ross Kempsell – but most have limited themselves to describing Kempsell, a former journalist, as merely the Conservative party's former political director.

In reality Kempsell, 30, is also Johnson's tennis partner and a close friend of Carrie Johnson. Quite apart from his services to the PM's backhand, Kempsell has, like Johnson, danced the narrow line between journalism and politics: originally at the *Guido Fawkes* blog, he moved on to TalkRadio, then to the Downing Street Policy Unit, then back to journalism for Times Radio.

He's also got an eye for fiction. When the story of his imminent move back to a senior job in Downing Street was broken in the *Mail* in November 2020, Kempsell corrected the journalist, Simon Walters, who had approached him for comment. "This story is untrue. I am very happy in journalism," Kempsell clarified. Shortly afterwards, his appointment to the £90,000 role at the Conservative research department was announced.

Kempsell and Owen were working on the short-lived Bring Back Boris campaign just a few weeks ago. The prospect of a good 60 years voting as members of the House of Lords wouldn't be a bad consolation prize.

BRED ADMIRAL

WHY on earth was the chancellor of the exchequer wearing a medal on Remembrance Sunday?

Some *Eye* readers wondered if it was the "Most Prestigious Equestrian Order of St Agatha", into which Hunt was invested by the tiny republic of San Marino a year ago. As *Eye* 1564 noted, this was arranged via the good offices of San Marino's honorary consul in London, businessman Maurizio Bragagni, who had been a major donor to Hunt's Tory leadership campaign in 2019.

But no: the medal is a thoroughly British LVO, Lieutenant of the Victorian Order, which was awarded to Hunt's father, an admiral. True, there is a custom of wearing family war medals at remembrance events, and although this has never had official approval and in fact is rather frowned upon, it's obviously perfectly harmless in the case of war widows and the like. "But to treat an LVO, an award for court service, like that is beyond absurd," says the *Eye*'s resident expert. "And additionally, rather than wearing his father's entire bar, simply wearing an LVO as if it's his own medal is crazy."

BANK MANAGER SAJ

NOT only does Sajid Javid MP expect to make more money from not being chancellor than he did at No 11, but he's using the cash to set up an office for the further glorification of, er, Sajid Javid.

British chancellors earn £71,000 on top of their salary as an MP. In a long ministerial career, Javid was only actually chancellor for eight months, from 2019 to 2020, but by doing just two speeches to the financial sector as an ex-chancellor he has already earned £66,000. These entailed a couple of hours' work preparing and giving one speech to HSBC and another to Deutsche Bank, his ex-employer.

More such largesse is likely on the way. In his entry on the register of MPs' interests, Javid says he will put cash from "speaking and related engagements" into a new firm he has set up, SJ Office Ltd, and use it to "pay employees, maintain my ongoing involvement in public life and support my charitable work". This may surprise those of Javid's constituents who thought his role in public life was to be their MP.

While having a well-funded public relations office may enable Javid to sit out the present turbulence in his party (perhaps even long enough to be around for a future Tory government), SJ Office Ltd will also supply him with £20,000 each year. The handy pocket money means Javid is earning funds from the very banks that blasted the world economy via toxic "securities", and have a history in laundered money and working with tax evaders and corrupt politicians. Fingers crossed his latest financial interest does not inhibit Javid's fierce scrutiny of bankers' (mis)behaviour in future.

BLUSH MONEY

KEEN Tories might be expected to book their hotels well in advance of the party's annual conference, but according to the MPs' register of interest, even senior MPs had to be tempted to attend October's get together by, er, gifts of free accommodation from interest groups.

Among them was then-backbencher **Michael Gove**, whose fringe meeting appearances put the case against the slash-and-burn economics being pursued by prime minister Liz Truss, thus contributing to her downfall and indirectly to his own return to cabinet. But he wasn't there under his own steam: paying £500 towards Gove's hotel bills was right-wing web magazine *Unherd*, which owes £5m to sugar-daddy hedge fund backer Paul Marshall (a sum it is unlikely to repay). Once a Lib Dem on the free market wing, Marshall harps on culture war themes and is a major investor in GB News. His investment in Gove means he also effectively helped to fund the anti-Truss manoeuvres.

Chair of the 1922 Committee **Sir Graham Brady** relied on Thatcherite think tank the Centre for Policy Studies to pay £762.45 for his hotel, despite not speaking at any of the CPS's 14 fringe meetings (although he may have attended some invitation-only CPS roundtables). Security minister **Tom Tugendhat** received £812.46 from the Somali Conservatives group for his four days in a hotel, kindly favouring them by addressing a meeting on supporting Somaliland.

The Conservative Friends of Israel paid £1,383 for **Robert Halfon**, then a backbencher and now education minister, to have four nights in a hotel – prices are high in conference season, but this still sounds quite grand. Likewise **Jesse Norman**, then a Foreign Office minister, squeezed one night's hotel accommodation at £400 out of Tory think tank Onward in return for speaking at a fringe event.

While these Tories needed help to turn up, at least they came; many MPs didn't bother coming at all – presumably in a sulky protest against Truss's doomed leadership.

PICK YOUR OWN

A SHORTFALL in pickers is leading to billions of meals going to waste each year in the UK before even leaving the farm, yet the government somehow remains on course to further strip back the seasonal worker scheme.

According to a report from the World Wildlife Fund, 6.9bn meals-worth of edible food go to waste each year in the UK before leaving the farm, largely due to labour shortages. A National Farmers' Union survey found that 40 percent of UK farms have crop losses due to the lack of workers, with farms on average 14 percent short for the 2022 season so far.

In June, the government said 38,000 seasonal worker visas would be available in 2022 for temporary migrants to work in the UK horticulture sectors. Nick Marston, of industry body British Berry Growers, recently told *Farmers Weekly*: "Horticulture needs at least 60,000 seasonal workers in 2023 and people are short of staff", meaning "a lot of crops were wasted this year because we didn't have the people".

Increasing the seasonal worker scheme could help (or even offering work to some of the 38,000 people arriving by small boat this year). Alas, the government is sticking with Boris Johnson's pledge to reduce the seasonal worker visa quota to 30,000 in 2023 and 28,000 in 2024. A government report this month states: "There has been no confirmation that an increase will be pursued under the Sunak government."

Instead, there are murmurings about a possible national service-style scheme for "Woofing" (from the volunteer-based organisation World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms) that would enable/plead with young people to work on the land – and may be more bark than bite.

CRYING WOLFSON

"IF WE do the right thing," Next boss Lord (Simon) Wolfson told the *Spectator* six months after the country voted for the Brexit to which his support had lent some serious business credibility, "it will probably take four or five years for Britain to show it is thriving outside the European Union."

Almost six years on, with the economy and trade already badly damaged and set to take further hits because of Brexit, the retail boss is left complaining that, unable to get the workers he needs, he has not got the "Brexit I wanted".

"We have got people queuing up come to this country to pick crops that are rotting in fields, to work in warehouses that otherwise wouldn't be operable, and we're not letting them in," complained Wolfson in a BBC interview last week. Aware that the government won't simply open the borders for the requisite army of low-skilled workers, Wolfson suggested allowing them in subject to an extra 10 percent tax, so as to favour domestic workers. Good luck with getting that one past a home secretary who dreams of flying asylum seekers to Rwanda!

PS: Wolfson also sponsors a prize for "fresh thinking which can challenge orthodoxy in economics and public policy", posing a different question each time. Perhaps the next one could be: "How do we clear up this mess I was instrumental in?"

"I've lost my house"

CALLED TO ORDURE

THREE former Whitehall non-executive directors (NEDs) were asked at a public administration committee session last week what, if anything, was the point of those roles. They struggled a bit. What a dilemma. Should they admit NEDs are pointless and mere pawns for political operators such as Michael Gove? Or should they insist they were worth their £20,000 for 15 days' work a year? (That's £170 an hour – ker-ching!)

Dame Sue Street, an ex-mandarin, was axed as a NED at the Ministry of Justice when Gove became secretary of state in 2015. She was replaced by Lizzie Noel, a rich Cameroon. Last week Street exacted revenge, praising Gove's predecessor Chris Grayling for having been "ready to hear challenge". The words "unlike that shit Gove" were not actually uttered but were clearly implied. To be compared unfavourably to that dud Grayling! Ouch.

Alongside Street at the committee hearing was Miranda Curtis, a private-sector memsahib. "I served two foreign secretaries – Mr Johnson and Mr Raab – neither of whom demonstrated any interest whatsoever in working with their non-executive teams," drawled Curtis. It was six months before Raab even met her. Three months later she was chopped as a NED. Curtis's lip curled as she called this a "lost opportunity".

Appointing private-sector NEDs was an early-Cameron initiative cooked up by Francis Maude with ex-BP boss Lord Browne, a pal of Peter Mandelson. They presented it as a way of modernising Whitehall. Equally, it created a new layer of patronage for ministers, and delicious access to Whitehall for industrialists. Browne and Mandelson loved that.

Sir Ian Cheshire, the third witness, kept referring to Maude as "Francis". It lent a chummy air to proceedings. Cheshire, who like Curtis is a trustee of the establishment-friendly Institute for Government think-tank, was ruder about Gove, accusing him of treating NEDs "almost as his special advisers and his ministers". Could have been worse – a NED at health was Matt Hancock's mistress.

"We tried to come up with cross-cutting themes and to deal with systems, people and better finance directives," waffled Cheshire. Street blethered away about "cross-fertilisation" of ideas, and a "cooperative, collective approach". Once a mandarin, always a mandarin.

Street would tip off officials if the board was planning an ambush. "It is tempting for captains of industry to show up officials in front of ministers and it does not really help anybody, in my opinion," she said severely. Er, might it not actually be useful for ministers to see if officials are useless? Street said it was her job to persuade ministers that civil servants would "help them meet their aspirations". Best joke of the day.

NEDs did sometimes do some good. Cheshire recalled a suggestion that Whitehall finances be run by qualified accountants, ie people who might actually be able to read a balance sheet. "Was that particularly novel?" asked William Wragg (C, Hazel Grove). Cheshire: "It was a bit of a new idea, yes."

The witnesses may have been critical of Gove appointing stooges, but Curtis admitted: "The process of my appointment was a single conversation with the permanent secretary." Street went a bit foggy about how she got the job. She had been invited to meet the minister and Sir Humphrey with a view to becoming a NED, "and then I was one". Just like that.

All three witnesses were appalled at the thought of MPs having a say on NED appointments. The gilded circle recoils from parliamentary scrutiny. And yet Street wanted non-execs to have more input in policy-making – "interrogating the evidence, understanding and questioning" policy proposals. Would that not make them *more* political?

Street disclosed that her son comforted her the day after Gove sacked her. "It's not personal, Mum," said the lad. "He has never met you. He has never spoken to you. He has never seen anything you have said or done." Seven years on, it was still plainly a raw wound.

'Gavel Basher'

● **PS:** Hold the front page! Someone made a joke in the Lords. Hereditary Labour peer Viscount Stansgate noted during a Lords debate about music that his daughter Emily is first violinist with the parliamentary string quartet, "which by the way is known as The Statutory Instruments".

● **PPS:** A striking sartorial choice by Tory MP Lee Anderson, who attended prime minister's questions wearing – eek – a black shirt. We know Big Lee likes to think himself a tough guy of the right (see *Eye* 1584), but really!?

BALLOT ACHE

WHEN deciding whether to reselect a sitting MP, Labour's rulebook relies on "trigger ballots" of branches and affiliates of a constituency Labour party (CLP). But some candidates seem to be more triggering than others.

Earlier this month Christian Wakeford, the former Tory MP for Bury South who crossed the floor in January, was told he had been exempted from Labour's trigger process. This gives CLP members no say on whether they want a former Conservative as their general election candidate – one who, not long before his defection, allegedly called Labour "a bunch of cunts" on WhatsApp. After his defection Wakeford was rewarded first with an appointment to the shadow education team, then as a Labour whip.

All of which is in contrast to the treatment of Sam Tarry, who as sitting MP for Ilford South faced a trigger ballot after strange goings on that included allegations of identity fraud; vote-rigging; CLP members receiving confirmation of their vote in favour of a trigger ballot when they had not voted; and party members voting who did not live in the constituency.

Tarry handed a dossier to Labour's general secretary David Evans urging him to investigate, but Evans said he doubted fraud was "widespread" and the issue of voting numbers not tallying was "misspeaking".

One difference with Wakeford is that Tarry was sacked as a shadow transport minister in July for broadcasting TV interviews from a picket during rail strikes. (Another is that he's going out with Labour deputy leader Angela Rayner.)

Tarry called in solicitors Carter-Fuck to accuse Evans of burying his head in the sand over the "self-evident gravity" of the alleged fraud – but to no avail. When a vote was finally held on who should represent Labour at the general election, Tarry lost to Redbridge council leader Jas Athwal by 371 votes to 499. The waters were muddied by some 600 postal ballots allegedly appearing from nowhere and some Tarry supporters being denied access to the meeting. Isn't democracy wonderful?

More HP over ☞

POLITICAL HEALTH WARNING: MD ON FAILING THE MOST VULNERABLE

Pretending to protect

PRIME minister Rishi Sunak and chancellor Jeremy Hunt have both promised that, whatever they do to fill the £60bn fiscal hole, they will "protect the most vulnerable". Sunak further claimed: "We did it in Covid and we will do it again" – a point conspicuously not endorsed by Hunt who, as chair of the health committee, described the pandemic response as "one of the worst public health failures in UK history".

True, Sunak's expensive financial aid packages helped many vulnerable people, with just £4.5bn wasted on error and fraud, according to the National Audit Office. But the UK is not funding Evusheld, a drug that could protect 500,000 vulnerable immunosuppressed patients from Covid (Eye 1580). And the most vulnerable were aways going to be the frail elderly, who were not well protected due to lack of planning, testing, personal protective equipment (PPE) and safe staffing levels in the NHS and social care. A virus that spreads before symptoms appear was always hard to stop, which made the decision to discharge untested elderly patients from hospital to care homes so dangerous. Former health secretaries Hunt and Matt "Emu Anus" Hancock will face awkward questions on pandemic preparedness at the public inquiry.

Who's in charge?

JOHN PENROSE MP, chair of the Conservative Policy Forum and husband to former test and trace supremo Dido Harding, has written in the Times on life expectancy, health inequality, housing quality, obesity, addiction, our unhealthy workforce and the NHS's record waiting lists and lack of recruitment. Quite a list. He ended by asking why these problems were routinely and consistently ignored. Why indeed. And another tough question for Penrose's Conservative Policy Forum: who has been in power for the past 12 years?

Saving general practice

JEREMY Hunt's final report as chair of the health and social care committee, The Future of General Practice, published on 20 October, paints a grim picture.

"Currently the profession is demoralised, GPs are leaving almost as fast as they can be recruited, and patients are increasingly dissatisfied with the level of access they receive… The root cause of this is straightforward: there are not enough GPs to meet the ever-increasing demands on the service, coupled with increasing complexity of cases from an ageing population.

"In May this year there were an estimated 27.5m appointments in general practice, more than 2m more than in 2019. Yet over the same period, the number of qualified, full-time equivalent GPs working in the NHS has declined by nearly 500 from 28,094 to 27,627. This gap between demand and capacity leaves GPs working harder and facing more burnout as patients find it harder than ever to see them…

"Patients can become confused over who they are signposted to and why, leaving GPs dealing with multiple complex cases one after another and as a result, contributing to concerns by the clinicians they might make mistakes or not be able to practise safely. This combination of intensely complex cases, done at speed, with fear over reprisals on the individual clinician is driving a systemically toxic environment in primary care."

Fortunately, Hunt's committee came up with lots of solutions. For example…

- Restoring individual patient lists and limiting them to, say, 2,500 patients, slowly reduced to around 1,850 over five years as more GPs are recruited.
- Government action to allow senior doctors, including GPs, to carry on working without huge pension tax liabilities.
- A better mechanism to fund deprived areas, giving equal access to general practice across the country.
- Making general practice the jewel in the NHS crown, with a cradle-to-grave relationship between doctors and patients. This means less micromanagement and more staff and investment, reducing pressure on hospitals.

Hunt's report was welcomed by GPs. Now he's chancellor, they're waiting for the investment and reforms to make it happen. Or was it all just talk?

Home-grown staff

KEIR STARMER's response to the NHS staffing crisis is that we are "recruiting too many workers from overseas". Labour will abolish non-dom tax status in the hope it will raise £1.6bn to double the number of UK medical training places, provide 10,000 extra nursing and midwifery training places, double the number of district nurses qualifying and provide 5,000 extra health visitors.

This is no short-term fix, and the NHS and social care will rely for the foreseeable future on overseas workers who contribute hugely and also benefit from the training they receive. When they are recruited from poorer countries that are also short of staff, the UK could contribute to training more doctors and nurses in those countries.

If Starmer is serious about restricting overseas recruitment, he needs to get his sums right. As the UK population ages and fattens and takes up more health resource, and the birth rate declines, so does the size of the workforce available to drive the economy. If more home-grown workers are employed in health and social care, will there be enough workers for other industries? And how will Labour retain the health and care workers they train, given high attrition rates?

Strike or leave

NURSES are due to take industrial action over pay and conditions, with junior doctors likely to vote for action in January.

How successful the Royal College of Nursing and the British Medical Association are in persuading the press and public that any harm to patients (eg delayed operations) justifies a strike remains to be seen. The BMA did not cover itself in glory in its battles with Hunt, who imposed an unpopular contract on junior doctors, many of whom then left the NHS.

NHS staff are very employable in other countries, and in other jobs in this country, and vacancies have risen to 132,000 in the NHS and 165,000 across social care. There is no point training extra staff if pay and conditions are so dire you can't retain them.

The strongest card nurses and doctors can play is to highlight how dangerous the NHS is at present. There have been 30,000 extra heart disease deaths since the start of the pandemic, with no sign of slowdown. There are 350,000 people waiting for what is euphemistically called "time-sensitive cardiac care". Routine outpatient appointments in some less glamorous specialties are now measured in years, and "two-week" urgent cancer referrals in months. The average emergency ambulance response time for October for suspected heart attacks and strokes was 61 minutes 19 secs in England, against a target of 18 mins. So it's no surprise excess deaths are still high even when Covid deaths are dipping. And 500,000 people are waiting for a social care assessment. Safe staffing in health and social care will only happen with decent pay and conditions. It shouldn't need strikes for ministers to get this. If they don't, many more vulnerable people will die young.

Cryptic Wes

SHADOW health secretary Wes Streeting recently told Andrew Marr on LBC radio that, when it comes to the NHS, "there isn't an answer to the immediate crisis that doesn't require more investment, which is why we've committed to the workforce investment, but I've also been honest in saying that if the answer in this century is always more taxpayers' money into a 20th century model of care, there isn't going to be an NHS in the long term…"

Streeting's 21st century NHS would major on prevention, earlier diagnosis and cheaper treatment, all of which require more staff and capacity. What will Labour do to reduce obesity, addiction, despair, poverty and other social determinants of health? And will any investment in earlier diagnosis and treatment be part of the NHS or outsourced to private providers?

Special advice

A HINT of where the NHS might be heading comes with the appointment of two new aides: Bill Morgan, who once advised former health secretary Andrew Lansley, arrives to advise No 10, while Robert Ede has been appointed by health secretary Steve Barclay.

Lansley was a fan of outsourcing NHS services to "any willing provider" and Ede recently co-authored a report with the Nuffield Trust on NHS capital investment. This argued that "the independent sector could be used to accelerate capital and infrastructure investment where analysis demonstrates its competitiveness.

"Opportunities exist in private planned surgery hubs (located proximally to main hospital sites), diagnostic centres, and rehabilitation and intermediate care. Circle Health have developed a rehab facility in Birmingham – offering a possible model which could be replicated elsewhere… To encourage private sector providers to invest in facilities which can address problems with waiting and in emergency care, additional funding is likely to be required in the short to medium term. A guarantee of this revenue would bring in private capital investment at scale."

As the private finance initiative and Independent Sector Treatment Centre experiments of former PM Tony Blair and his chancellor Gordon Brown showed, private loans and provision offer a short-term political fix but risk coupling crippling long-term debts with poor value for money.

Circle, meanwhile, doesn't own its facilities but leases them at high cost from US REIT Medical Properties Trust Ltd with index-linked rental payments. How much would the NHS pay to lease from the leasers? And will we return to offering private providers guaranteed revenues to enter the NHS market, no matter what they deliver? That's less protecting the vulnerable and more protecting the private sector.

GRENFELL: FAULT LINES

THE second phase of the Grenfell Tower public inquiry opened with a warning that those involved in the events that led to the fire that killed 72 people would engage in "a merry-go-round of buck-passing". It has just ended after 312 days of evidence, more expressions of "deepest sympathy" for the bereaved, survivors and residents (BSRs) and more declarations that it was all someone else's fault.

In his closing statement, lead counsel to the inquiry Richard Millett KC said the evidence pointed to "a single overall conclusion" that "each and every one of the risks" leading to events that night were well known or ought to have been known, so "each and every one of the deaths that occurred in Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017 was avoidable".

He shared the blame between factors including incompetence in the construction industry; weak and incompetent building control; cynical and possibly even dishonest practices by product suppliers; incompetence, weakness and malpractice by those responsible for testing and certifying materials; and a failure of central government to act despite known risks.

Millett accused many participants of using the inquiry to position themselves for legal proceedings that might follow, to minimise their exposure to liability. Some, mainly public sector bodies, had made admissions of fault, but he summed up the evidence of many others in what he called a "web of blame" with a diagram showing arrows pointing at everyone else. "If everything that has been said is correct, then nobody is to blame for the Grenfell Tower fire," he said. "Can that really be right?"

Among the cast of characters, Arconic, supplier of the combustible aluminium composite material (ACM) cladding panels with polyethylene cores used in the refurbishment, challenged the finding in phase one of the inquiry that they were the principal reason the flames spread so rapidly. It blamed combustible material around the windows, the conduct of combustible insulation manufacturers Celotex and Kingspan in assuring the market their products could be used at height, the design team for failing to read and understand the product certification, and even the heat loading from the contents of flats.

Celotex argued that Arconic knew years before that its ACM (PE) was "inherently dangerous" and failed to warn the market, and blamed construction professionals for not understanding regulatory requirements. Kingspan blamed the "uniquely hazardous" cladding and "inadequacies of the regulatory regime" plus the refurbishment's design and construction teams. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities apologised for failings in the regulatory and compliance regime but criticised others for exploiting them.

Those are just a few examples of what counsel for one group of BSRs called "a rogues' gallery" of manufacturers, contractors, subcontractors, designers, consultants, testing and certification agencies and local and central government organisations linked to the fire. Inquiry chair Sir Martin Moore-Bick must now consider how to judge their actions. His final report is expected next year.

CRIME BOTCH

IT MIGHT be time for the UK's scandal-ridden offender tagging system to be unshackled from the pisspoor private companies under whose control it has stumbled from one fiasco to another.

A recent report by the Commons public accounts committee reveals that last year a contract for a case management system had to be terminated at a cost of £98m (which used to be a lot of money). At the heart of the foul-up, *Eye* readers won't be surprised to learn, is outsourcing company Capita.

More than a decade ago the Cameron government decided to deal with the inefficiency in the tagging programme through a new monitoring system called Gemini, to be run by Crapita. By 2021, the MPs found, the prison and probation service "had spent around £157m on its tagging transformation programme" before terminating it as a lost cause. "Both its and its supplier's [Capita] failure to deliver the new case management system, Gemini, wasted £98m," they concluded.

The tagging service, which also underwent a "reset" in 2017 following fraud scandals involving Serco and G4S, is now "relying on legacy technology and will have to use its current case management system until at least 2024, which will cost £9.8m for remediation work and licensing costs". The old-fashioned phone system Capita uses in a supposedly "live service" has itself "failed six times since May 2021". The result is that the taggers have "failed to provide police forces and the probation service with timely access to the tagging information they need to effectively supervise offenders and protect the public".

CAPITA

Worse still, the whole fandango could be a complete waste of time anyway. Despite having previously been told by the committee that it should evaluate the tagging programme, the Ministry of Justice has not done so. As a result: "The Ministry and [prison and probation service] still do not know what works and for who, and whether tagging reduces reoffending."

Despite this they are ploughing on. In his previous stint as justice secretary last year, Dominic Raab (now back in his old job) announced a drastic extension of tagging. Around 10,000 more offenders are expected to join the 15,000 already sporting Peckham Rolexes over the next three years under a £1.2bn expansion of the programme. Then again, if chancellor Jeremy Hunt cuts spending based on usefulness, the plug might be pulled anyway.

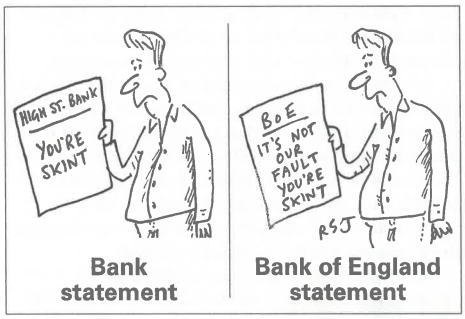
PILOT BLIGHT

"THE time required for the training of competent pilots further reduces Russia's ability to regenerate combat air capability," noted one of the UK Defence Intelligence public updates on the war in Ukraine last week, after figures suggested Russia has lost 278 aircraft in the conflict thus far.

The timescales for training competent pilots must also worry officials at the Ministry of Defence (MoD) after defence secretary Ben Wallace had to admit to MPs that Britain has just 33 fighter pilots fully qualified to fly its 27 shiny new F-35 planes – noting that this was "not a staggering amount". They aren't even all RAF pilots: some of the 33 are on loan from Australia and the US.

MoD figures show that around 300 people are stuck in the RAF's pilot training pipeline, mostly waiting to take the next step in the lengthy process for specialist flying. More than 250 are "on hold", awaiting places for the next step in "Jet/Multi Engine/Air Mobility & ISTAR/Rotary Wing" training. Extra places have been requested by the MoD on an EU-Nato joint jet pilot training scheme run in America, in an effort to speed things up.

Wallace told the defence committee that the RAF faces a "slight catch-22… How do you get the pilots? You need the instructors. How do you get the instructors? You need the pilots."



Bank statement | **Bank of England statement**

"Have you considered changing to an uncaring profession?"

"That's even more than Boris Johnson!"

EU-phemisms

"It is time to end the post-Brexit battle with Britain"

Now we think we've won

EYE WORLD

Ugandan discussions!

UGANDAN high commissioner Nimisha Madhvani had an audience with King Charles last week, but there are concerns over whether the UK should have accepted her in the role given incidents in her other postings.

When she was first secretary at the embassy of Uganda in the US, Madhvani used diplomatic immunity to dodge legal action following a complaint of trafficking and forced labour from her housekeeper. The 2005 case is detailed as a case study in a paper published by the *Duke Journal of International and Comparative Law* on the use of immunity in relation to mistreatment of servants within various diplomatic missions.

Ugandan domestic worker Susan Waru filed court papers alleging she had been working seven days a week without wages, had had her passport confiscated and was afraid to leave because she would be arrested and deported. Madhvani claimed immunity but the case against non-diplomatically immune members of the household was eventually settled.

In 2020, Madhvani was recalled as

ambassador to Denmark after being caught on a recorded Zoom meeting discussing with other embassy staff plans to direct unspent money (intended to aid Ugandan citizens stranded by Covid 19 travel restrictions) into diplomats' own pockets.

Madhvani is the daughter of the late wealthy east African industrialist Jayantbhai Muljibhai Madhvani and her appointment was warmly welcomed by Lord (Dolar) Popat, former prime minister Boris Johnson's trade envoy to Uganda, as good news for increased trade. The *Eye* understands the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office was aware of her track record when approving her for the post.

Commonwealth gamesmanship

WHEN the Commonwealth held jolly, flag-waving ceremonies outside its Marlborough House HQ in London last month to welcome new French-speaking African members Gabon and Togo, no one seemed bothered that both are run by leaders who inherited their countries from despotic fathers and who hang on to power by manipulating elections.

"I would like to solemnly ask each one of you to bear witness to Togo's renewed pledge to the values of peace, democracy and development, which are the core values of the family we are joining," said Togo's US-educated president Faure Gnassingbé.

It's certainly all about family. Gnassingbé was installed as president when his father, Gnasssingbé Eyadéma, an ex-French army NCO, died in 2005, 38 years after taking power in a military coup. Under pressure to democratise, Faure resigned the presidency and stood for election, but only of the kind his father had been staging for years. He won; and the security forces killed about 1,000 people who protested at the dynastic shoo-in.

Opposition is now allowed in Togo, but it is not allowed to win elections. Two years ago, Faure won his fourth election. Admittedly, he has now revoked the abolition of presidential term-limits which his father had introduced, but it is not retrospective, so despite having been in power for 17 years, he could stay on until 2030.

The story of Gabon's president, Ali Bongo Ondimba, is not dissimilar. His father, Omar Bongo, also groomed his boy for succession. As in Togo, the old man was the world's longest-serving president, having been in power for 42 years on his death in 2009. Unlike Togo, however, the top job in Gabon comes with a legacy in the form of a modest oil industry, which the Bongo family uses for conspicuous personal consumption. In the five years to 2011, Bongo *père* and then *fils* spent $125m renting jets, including a Boeing 777, to flit between Libreville, Paris and Geneva, according to a charter airline which had to sue to get paid.

Bongo *père* also abolished the limit on the number of times a president could stand for office, and lengthened the term to seven years – a law that remains on the statute book.

Like Faure, Ali Bongo held a snap election shortly after his father's death, and the next one, in 2016, came under heavy fire. EU election observers, among others, noted that in Bongo's home province of Haut Ogooué, turnout was 99.93 percent and the vote for Bongo 95.5 percent. Protesters burnt down parliament and hundreds were detained.

In her welcome, Commonwealth secretary-general Baroness (Patricia) Scotland trilled: "I am thrilled with the addition of these two vibrant countries to our family – a tight-knit family based on the certainty that no matter what challenges we face, the Commonwealth always comes together to face them as one. We leave no one behind. This, I believe, is what makes the Commonwealth special." Given what Togo and Gabon know about tight-knit family values, they should fit right in.

Nigerian cop show

THE run-up to this month's COP27 summit in Egypt rang with anxious calls for action on climate change by UN officials. There was a special plea for international finance to help developing countries from deputy secretary-general Amina J Mohammed.

As she wrote in the *Guardian* earlier this month: "African countries need finance urgently to build resilience and adapt to the devastating impacts of a crisis they did nothing to cause."

Mohammed knows a thing or two about using international finance to clean up environmental messes. In 2015-16, she served as environment minister back home in Nigeria, where western oil companies are accused of wreaking havoc in the Niger Delta. Alas, there was no space in the article to mention the hundreds of millions of dollars Nigeria has already received to tackle decades of pollution by Big Oil via a programme she commissioned.

In 2016, Mohammed set up the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) to implement the UN Environment Programme's (UNEP) $1bn clean-up strategy. But there's precious little to show for most of the hundreds of millions (no one is quite sure how much since HYPREP has never published accounts).

Handsome contracts go to unqualified firms with no expertise. They promise to test water and soil and remove affected earth but instead take the clean-up task, ahem, rather more literally and simply trouser the funds. In one case, an outfit wanted US$50m to clean one of the very few sites independently verified as undamaged.

The man Mohammed appointed to run HYPREP in January 2017 owns such a company. Amid allegations of corruption and incompetence he was eventually removed, but if anything the situation in Nigeria has become even worse. Officials and contractors are linked to politicians who need cash for elections in February, not environmental remediation. Shell's local subsidiary, which provides the financing, is happy to turn a greenwashing blind eye, especially as its former staffers are among the lucky contractors. UNEP executives fume but can do nothing.

Given the mess on the ground, Mohammed must be relieved now to be in New York, far above such filth.

Postcard from Stockholm

WITH darkness drawing in and snow on the horizon, Swedes begin their annual ritual of hibernation. For those of a liberal bent, there's good reason to disappear into their country den this winter: the fallout from the victory of a Conservative-led coalition in September's elections.

What marks out the new centre-right governing amalgam – and leaves liberals pining for the woods – is the support it's receiving from the Sweden Democrats (SD), a far-right party with neo-fascist roots. It has been a feature of our political scene for more than a decade now, winning its first parliamentary seats in 2010. What's different this time is that the Sweden Democrats won more than 20 percent of the vote – the second biggest score, beating the more mainstream Conservatives (*Moderaterna*) into third place and rendering the SD effective kingmakers.

The Conservatives and their centre-right coalition partners have made a deal with the SD – another first – under which the former brownshirts have agreed to support them in parliamentary votes, but from outside government itself. A far-right party inside the ruling tent was a step too far for some of its other occupants, at least for now.

So what's the secret of the onetime neo-Nazi party's meteoric rise? Partly it is the way it successfully persuaded enough voters that there is a link between a recent rise in violent crime and the presence of more foreigners in Sweden – a claim vigorously challenged by most other parties.

Indeed, some SD politicians used the recent election campaign openly to blame Islam for many of Sweden's problems, effectively saying "you can't expect people from different cultures to live peacefully under the same roof." The message was better received in some places than others. The party scored highly in southern Skåne country, a bastion of traditional conservative support (and where fascism, imported from across the Baltic, was notably popular in the 1930s). In more cosmopolitan, metropolitan areas like Stockholm, it managed only 10 percent of the vote, and only a little higher in Gothenburg city.

The agenda of Conservative PM Ulf Kristersson is already starting to look like a sop to the SD, which tries hard these days to tone down its language, at least in public, on race, religion and immigration. Ministers are mulling new restrictions, including: a big reduction in the number of refugees allowed to enter Sweden each year (from 5,000 currently to 900); a potential end to our permanent residence system; and – most obviously SD influenced – the expulsion of people who've "not integrated" into our supposedly open, tolerant country.

But the influence of the SD's identity politics goes beyond immigration. Soon after the elections, the new foreign minister announced that he was abandoning the commitment to a "feminist foreign policy" introduced by the Social Democrats in 2014 (a global first) because, it seems, the policy competed with the primacy of "Swedish interests and values".

In another nod to the SD, the incoming government has also announced that it is abolishing in its entirety the Environment Ministry, established 35 years ago. In tandem with signals of increased funding for the development of new nuclear power stations, things already appear to be going backwards in environmental terms.

All of which is a delight to those who think Sweden's liberal experiment has gone too far, too fast. For the rest, a long winter beckons.

SIGNAL FAILURES

Hard lines

WHILE politicians wrangle over rail-network enhancements, including the long-promised "Northern Powerhouse Rail", rail managers are working out how much they'll have to cut the existing network next year.

Sources say there are draconian funding cuts in the Department for Transport's 2023-24 budgets for train firms. Meeting the cuts could involve mothballing trains, reducing timetables and closing branch lines – presentable as temporary responses to current fiscal problems but potentially permanent.

Thinning out timetables, for instance, would erode revenue. Why take the train into town if the evening service home has been axed? Destroyed connections between trains would force passengers to wait for longer mid-journey, making trains less appealing.

Replacing branch trains with buses would diminish passenger numbers. That's assuming local bus firms can take on the extra commitments amid acute driver shortages – and replacement buses will be vulnerable to the same ad hoc cancellations as existing bus services. Shrinking revenue then strengthens the case for permanent branch-line closure, especially if Network Rail would incur spending (at its astronomical rates) to return the infrastructure to current safety standards after long periods of disuse.

None of this should surprise *Eye* readers. While current prime minister Rishi Sunak was chancellor, train fares rose faster than inflation annually while fuel duty was frozen, and then cut, for all motorists (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*).

Rail cuts are needed because Tory dogma precludes restructuring the system for efficiency. Having admitted last year that the fragmented structure is a failure and lacks proper leadership, DafT carried on dishing out contracts and contract extensions, including to pisspoor Avanti West Coast last month.

DafT has chosen to continue paying the Trainline website to sell tickets in competition against the train firms DafT subsidises (*Eye* 1584). Millions of fares designed to poach revenue from rival franchisees still clog up the ticketing system and confuse people, even though all the revenue has gone to the government since March 2020 (*Eye* 1572). Drivers and guards still can't be deployed flexibly as they belong to different firms (*Eye* 1579).

The fragmented railway's whopping inefficiency was confirmed by the official "Rail Value for Money Study" in 2011, which the government ignored. Businesses routinely use mergers to shrink overheads but the Tories foisted even more "contractual interfaces" on the railway, creating the East West Rail company and forcing the sale of NR's commercial property in 2018.

Thus the railway still has dozens of "human resources" departments, managing directors, finance directors, etc. Thousands more people make a living from rail regulation, attributing train delays, micromanaging train firms, legal services and consultancy. Masses of unnecessary jobs could be dumped with no detriment to passengers – but the Tories have shown for years that they prefer to harm passengers and protect the hangers-on instead.

'Dr B Ching'

WRIGHT ON BRAND

THE government proudly trumpeted its £20.8m export support for "the world's first hydrogen-powered, zero carbon double deck bus" earlier this month. The bus company, Wrightbus, is owned and run by Tory donor Jo Bamford.

Government department UK Export Finance is guaranteeing 80 percent of the £26m loans County Antrim-based Wrightbus is using to build its bus business and chase international sales. "It's fantastic to see Great British companies like Wrightbus take full advantage of the opportunities exporting opens up," trade secretary Kemi Badenoch gushed.

Many investors think hydrogen power is a "green growth" opportunity – although hydrogen can also be created in non-environmentally friendly ways. Wrightbus's hydrogen-powered buses can be "net zero" as long as the source of hydrogen is sufficiently green.

Bamford, who took over Wrightbus in 2019 (*Eyes passim*), also launched a hydrogen investment fund, HyCap, last year and part-owns a pro-hydrogen lobbying company, Beyond2050, which had a big presence at this year's Tory and Labour party conferences, organising big "Hydrogen Zones" at the conferences dominated by a double-decker Wrightbus. (He has donated £74,000 to the Tories since 2019.)

Wrightbus's sales and profits are increasing, but there are reasons to worry about Bamford's business sense. Last year he launched a US lawsuit in a struggle for control of a firm he had founded there with a friend. He lost the case, with embarrassing details revealed in court, including Bamford admitting to using a company email account to order cannabis and the court saying Bamford used complex structures "he believed would help minimise his taxes in the United Kingdom".

Olney, Milton Keynes

The Agri Brigade

WITH a deadly form of bird flu wreaking havoc in the UK poultry industry and its wild bird population, 2.3m chickens, ducks, turkeys and geese have been culled and keepers are once more required to confine their birds indoors to reduce the chance of them catching the disease or spreading it to wild birds. But what is being done to ensure that "game birds", reared for shooting, are not fuelling the epidemic?

Every year, 57.6m game birds are released into the UK countryside to be shot (10 times the number released in 1961): 45m pheasants; 10m red-legged partridges; and 2.6m mallard ducks. At first they are reared in captivity to protect them from foxes, badgers, birds of prey and other natural predators. Until they are released, they are treated as poultry and subject to regulation, though compliance by many shoots is believed to be poor, with less than half those held prior to release likely to be registered.

At the point of release into the countryside, these "poultry" metamorphose into "wild birds" in the eyes of the law, though many game birds continue to be fed and corralled in outside areas in huge densities on single landholdings. Given that pheasants have tested positive to the disease on multiple occasions in the UK, it seems likely the release of tens of millions of game birds is likely to contribute to the spread of bird flu.

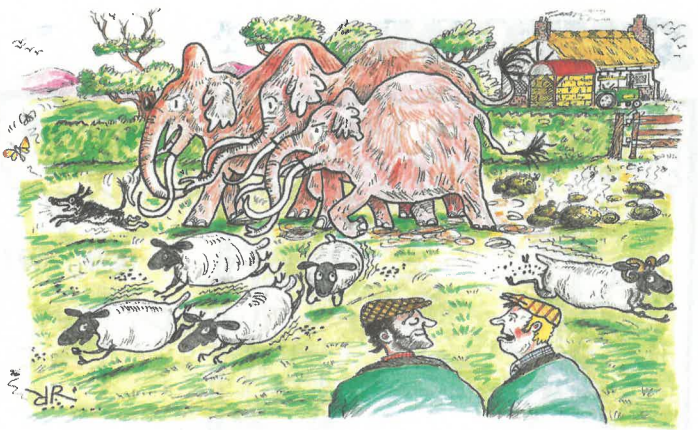
Avian flu can be transmitted through direct contact between individual birds, through water and feed that has been contaminated with faeces, or secretion through the "nose" or mouth of infected birds. The virus can also persist on soil, metal or glass for up to 13 days and in water for more than a year, depending on temperature and salinity.

EU laws prevent movement of eggs and chicks if there has been a bird flu outbreak, so there have been few or no (legal) imports of eggs or chicks into the UK this year. Normally the UK imports 23m day-old pheasant and partridge chicks and hatching eggs a year, 93 percent of which come from France, where 1,121 cases of bird flu were reported on poultry premises in the nine months from October 2021 to July 2022.

With such imports banned, the number of game birds released in the UK this year has been significantly reduced. But this reduction is only temporary and tens of millions of birds of UK-reared game birds have still been released into the countryside for shooting.

Many of the UK's most precious wild bird colonies have already been decimated by bird flu, and two-fifths of the UK's 1.4m free-range turkeys have been infected and culled. And yet there are still no government proposals to enforce the registration of game birds or introduce measures to reduce the risk of these birds, reared simply for sport, spreading bird flu to wild birds and poultry.

'Bio-Waste Spreader'



"Re-wilding's been a success then?"

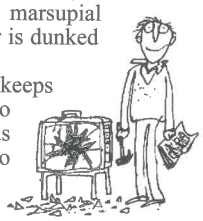
TV EYE

I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here! (ITV)

LATE on Sunday night came a moment of television to be rerun for decades by biographers analysing the self-delusion and self-preservation of politicians, or agony aunts advising middle-aged men on whether to leave their families for the foxy colleague at work.

Only five days after entering **I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here!**, the Right Hon Matt Hancock MP (though desperate West Suffolk constituents shouldn't contact him at the moment) was taking part in the fifth "bushtucker trial", in which viewers vote for who chews marsupial pudenda, gets smothered in critters or is dunked in their gunk.

"Why do you think the public keeps choosing *you*?" asked Dec or Ant. "No idea!" insisted Hancock, as blithely as blanking Laura Kuenssberg on why so many care home residents died of Covid or a PPE contract went to the landlord of Hancock's local pub.



Can he really not understand that the nightly humiliation results from a "red-eyed wall" coalition of those who blame him for the Covid deaths of relatives, plus abandoned wives and children (possibly including his own), and perhaps executives at Channel 4, which believed his first reality TV appearance would be in *SAS: Who Dares Wins* next year? Presumably Hancock was doing what politicians do – putting personal ambition before veracity – but, if so, it negated his declared reason for going down under for a rumoured £400,000 while parliament is sitting: seeking "a little bit of forgiveness" by being prepared to chew kangaroo fanny in peak-time.

There's no question that *IACGMOOH!*, in its 22nd season, needed a reboot. During pandemic sabbaticals in a Welsh castle, ratings and interest dipped. The signings of Hancock, Boy George (a genuine star) and Mike Tindall (the show's closest to a real royal) are a publicity coup, and overnight ratings for early episodes indicated that ITV had achieved a 20-month peak-time ratings high, even before Hancock's arrival.

Paradoxically, bosses are now concerned that the relentless focus on levelling down the former health secretary may now suppress the numbers. At one level, this year continues an unexpected late strain of political satire on a show that brutally mocked Boris Johnson last year. But while there's definitely a satirical sting in a failed politician winning nightly landslides that entail actually being engulfed in landslides of slugs, snakes and reptilian emissions, the vast national revenge for Covid policy is overbalancing the show.

Reality TV has always been a court of celebrity appeal, but the inclusion of Hancock, with so much of the audience traumatised by Covid, takes *IACGMOOH!* into dark new areas. (Astonishingly, Boy George, who served a jail term for assault and false imprisonment, escapes scrutiny because campmates are so keen to interrogate the former secretary of state about their nan's death or his CCTV "booty grab" of Gina.)

Even as Hancock is given a hard time in camp, it feels morally grotty that his first sustained interrogation should come not from Lady Hallett in the official Covid inquiry but from singers, comedians and DJs in the rainforest between munches of koala gonads.

The politician's daily Covid press conferences were dubbed "Hancock's Half-Hour", but currently we have a nightly hour of the same over-eager, falsely matey persona. Bizarrely, viewers even voted for him to compete for what is usually considered a treat – being camp leader – making even more of each weekend episode about him. As a rebellion against Hancock brewed (led by Boy George and Chris Moyles), is this incredibly sophisticated viewer-led satire in which the camp boss will suffer a Truss-like fall (Ant or Dec produced a lettuce from under the table to measure his tenure against), or has an ensemble show became dangerously solo?

While Hancock gets karma, Boy George is being charmingly chameleon, while Tindall keeps out of the way most of the time. Again, though outwardly a great booking, the rugby star and royal consort may not deliver as wished. It seems likely that if, as ITV presumably hopes, a jungle-mate asks "what did Zara's gran actually die from?" or "what do you make of Meghan?", Tinders will pretend he's got a slug stuck in his ear or just give them one of the "very firm hugs" that are so far his main persona on the show. Buckingham Palace courtiers may also be watching carefully with a view to warning the king that his vision of a cut-down monarchy with few working royals risks widening the pool of peripheral members of the Firm tempted by a jungle pay-day.

Part of the skill of *IACGMOOH!* is that viewers are mentally casting future series, the current wish-list including Sir Gavin Williamson, David Walliams and Prince Andrew, in due course gagging on the willies and arses of Australian creatures not yet born. But for that to happen, ITV will have to hope Hancock doesn't do to its super-franchise what he did to the NHS and Gina.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

SEASON 5 of *The Crown* has received perhaps the most brutal reviews of any big returning British series – two stars (out of five) from the *Guardian* and *Telegraph* and none from the *Daily Mail*, which concluded there are "no depths of bad taste that writer Peter Morgan does not plumb". Only Carol Midgely in the *Times* stuck to the view that, however factually inaccurate, *The Crown* is lavish fun.

All other outlets, in an unreserved apology for earlier praise, revealed it had now come to their attention that *The Crown* is gruesomely inappropriate (scenes of the queen undergoing a medical investigation, dramatising of the death from cancer of five-year-old Leonora Knatchbull) and recklessly inaccurate: this season's inventions include Brian plotting with John Major to force Brenda's abdication in 1991.

But, while the Netflix show has faced tougher scrutiny this time due to the queen's death and portrayal of prime ministers (Major, Tony Blair) who are alive and have lawyers, Morgan is doing nothing new, as *TV Eye* has been pointing out for six years.

Of Season 1 in 2016 (*Eye* 1431), Remote Controller noted how Morgan set the tone with a shot of George VI coughing blood into a bowl, and the liberties he took with safely dead characters including "Anthony Eden and Princess Margaret… depicted respectively as a scheming villain and a loose-knickered piss-head".

So great were the falsifications of event and chronology in Season 2 (*Eye* 1461) – including moving the filming of the *Royal Family* documentary two years earlier – that concern was expressed about "Morgan's abdication-of-responsibility crisis", with the writer cynically taking advantage of "the fact that the royals, by convention, never publicly complain nor sue".

Of Season 3 (*Eye* 1507): "*The Crown* has unlimited budgets… and the pick of any actor it wants, but what is that worth if most of it didn't happen, and the bits that did happened at another time?" Reviewing Season 4 (*Eye* 1535), we lamented Morgan's "Pound Shop Freud" characterisation and the anomaly that, while Netflix stubbornly refused to run a disclaimer admitting the level of fiction, it solemnly warned of "scenes of eating disorders" (due to a shot of Lady Di puking).

Under pressure, the production company, which as a US-based streamer isn't regulated by Ofcom, has finally put up a porkies warning, but newspapers should probably post a disowner on earlier reviews. What took them so long? The cracks in *The Crown* were clear from the start and have merely deepened as it reaches events the audience recognise and against which living participants can hit back, with Charles apparently employing surrogates (Major and actor Judi Dench) to rubbish the series publicly in a way his parents never did.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£400,000 Increase in Matt Hancock's income from his *I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here!* fee

£3,000 Expected increase in cost of living next year for constituents Hancock won't be in parliament to represent when chancellor sets out plans to deal with economic crisis

TALK AIN'T CHEAP

PLUGGING his Talk TV (prop: R. Murdoch) show in the *Sunday Times* (prop: R. Murdoch), Piers Moron boasted about Australian prime minister Scott Morrison trying to schmooze him after discovering *Piers Morgan Uncensored* would air down under, and how Donald Trump had "gone nuts" and warned him his own appearance on the show would lead to "a final burst of ratings before it all comes crashing down".

An odd choice of things to boast about, given the Aussie broadcast of the show was swiftly demoted to a graveyard slot, and the Trump episode provided a high of 317,000 viewers which has now dwindled to a humiliating average of between 14,000 and 19,000, with very few staying until the end.

Despite this, News UK is still pouring money into the venture, and Moron himself. According to recent accounts, parent company News Corp racked up $20m of additional costs in its latest quarter, much of which is thought to have been spent on TalkTV. As well as Moron's reported £50m three-year deal, guests are reportedly paid huge sums for appearances – sometimes as much as £50,000, meaning well over £1 per viewer.

Moron can claim more success on YouTube, where his big interviews with guests who are too toxic for other channels have been gaining more traction. These include chats with antisemitic Kanye West and sexist Andrew Tate, who have both been suspended from social media sites for their offensive posts. This week's genuine scoop with Cristiano Ronaldo is also bound to provide a boost. So TalkTV is investing yet more in following up those relative hits, with a new online-only show dedicated to poring over their ramblings, hosted by influencers Josh Pieters and Archie Manners. But this has racked up only a few thousand viewers. Before long the title of this spin-off show, *The Post Morgan*, may become eerily literal…

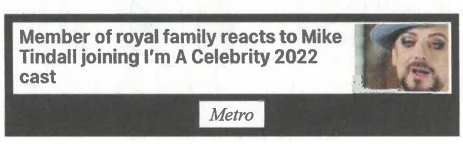
LOCAL DIFFICULTIES

LESS than three years after Declan Wilson, head of TV and online news for BBC England, embarked on his disastrous "reorganisation" of BBC England (*Eye* 1527), another new plan has been announced – initially on Zoom – for hundreds of news hacks in local TV, radio and online in the regions.

"Local Value for All" plans to shift the focus to online news. Ironically, the announcement for this push into digital didn't start well: "technical issues" meant the first of many Zoom calls was delayed. Once the tech was working, hacks learned they would now be expected to primarily write online copy, rather than get out talking to people and doing the job they joined for. And new investigations teams, while welcome, will be working primarily online: no substitute for the canned and much-loved *Inside Out* series (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*).

The closure of *We Are England*, the dire and short-lived replacement for *Inside Out*, will entail a loss of 40 jobs, along with 139 local radio staffers, while 131 online jobs will be created. That adds up to a net loss of 48 jobs, although the true extent of the cuts is disguised by the fact that scores of freelances will also lose regular shifts.

All the senior local TV news and radio bosses in England had to reapply for new jobs under this plan. The *Eye* reckons there are just over 50 of them – but 13 either didn't bother applying or, if they got the job, decided to leave anyway. Hardly a vote of confidence.



"They could call them the 'Flush Fucker Trials"

TOILET HUMOUR

HOW goes GB News's rearguard action against the march of gender-neutral toilets across Britain?

In May, its website reported National Trust members urging the organisation to "stop being woke" over loos; in June, Wimbledon was "slammed by angry fans after installing gender-neutral toilets"; in September came the report that a House of Commons toilet had "changed to gender neutral sparking outrage from female MPs"; and in late October it emerged that "senior Tory MP" Caroline Nokes wanted "gender-neutral toilets in schools to ensure children are 'supported'." Anyone else expressing so much interest in other people's loos might expect a visit from a kindly shrink.

Readers who want to see what a proper British toilet looks like should pop along to GB News studios, where visitors to the channel's poorly adapted office basement in Paddington can take advantage of one of half a dozen… gender-neutral cubicles. When will GB News run an exposé on this ghastly, woke outrage?

BREWER'S BLOOP

EVERYONE's favourite venture capital-backed "punks", Brewdog, have "made a stand" about the football World Cup in Qatar.

Launching the brand's "anti-sponsorship" of the tournament, the company announced: "All the profits from our Lost Lager sold during the tournament are going to fight human rights abuse." Hurrah!

That might be a more meaningful gesture, were it not for the fact that the company will continue to profit from its beers being sold in Qatar throughout the tournament thanks to a deal with a third-party distributor in the region. In a statement Brewdog told the *Just Drinks* website that it "doesn't mean it endorses human rights abuses" in the country – which may be true, but it also doesn't mean Brewdog knows the first thing about making a protest that actually means something. Trebles all round!

ONE media outlet which has gone curiously silent on the whole subject of Qatar is digital news site *Vice*.

A search reveals plenty of scathing articles about the decision to award the World Cup to the human-rights-abusing nation – but most turn out to be headed by the helpful advice "FYI: This story is over five years old". *Vice* appears to have made no mention of the controversy in the past two years.

Of course, more recently *Vice* itself has changed its views on the human rights violations in Gulf states. In 2018 it promised to end its ties with Qatari neighbour Saudi Arabia after the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. It went on to open an office in Saudi capital Riyadh in 2021, helped organise a government-run music festival, and is now in talks for a content deal worth at least $50m.

MORAL VACUUM

GOOD news for Channel 4 as billionaire entrepreneur Sir James Dyson is humiliated in the libel courts. Even more humiliated is his expert dream team of lawyers. Hugh Tomlinson KC and Schillings had claimed a Channel 4 news item on exploitation of workers by an overseas supplier was defamatory of Dyson personally and two of his eponymous companies.

The first company, UK-based Dyson Technology Ltd, holds intellectual property and brand rights but also employs some of Sir James's executive team and "retains advisers to protect the reputation" of the great Brexiteer who left Blighty for Singapore and then returned. Also apparently defamed by the February news item was Dyson Ltd, the patriot's UK trading company.

Tomlinson claimed the reasonable viewer would have taken the exposé as meaning the three claimants were "complicit in the systematic abuse and exploitation of workers" and "complicit in the persecution and torture of a worker who blew the whistle" about Malaysian supplier ATA Industrial. He argued that the news item caused "serious harm" to the reputation of Sir James and "serious financial loss" to his two companies, requiring at least £320,000 to put right the damage. This figure excluded the huge fees of Tomlinson, whose brief fee for a half-day hearing was £20,000, and Schillings partner Rachel Atkins, whose hourly rate is £720.

With these eye-watering numbers, Channel 4 unsurprisingly asked for a cap on legal fees in the event it lost. Mr Justice Nicklin agreed and set the cap at £27,500. He then went on, in a preliminary hearing, to conclude rather scathingly that Sir James was not personally defamed because the allegations had been "clearly targeted", adding that only a "hopelessly naïve" viewer would think the entrepreneur had personal involvement in the matters aired.

Tomlinson (who also chairs press campaign group Hacked Off) and Schillings are not bound by the costs cap in any future stages of the case – and they will be able to continue hoovering up huge fees should Sir James decide to press on.

MALGORITHMS

Guardian: "Climate crisis: UN finds 'no credible pathway to 1.5C in place'"

Accompanying sponsored content: "Seven reasons to book a festive trip to Austria" (Holidays in Austria)

Telegraph: "'Wine o'clock' lifestyle blamed for 'worrying' rise in liver cancer in last decade"

Accompanying ad: "Introducing Telegraph Wine Cellar. The easy way to find the perfect wine"

DUMB BRITAIN

Tipping Point, ITV

Ben Shephard: The corpus callosum is a thick band of nerve fibres located in which organ of the human body?
Contestant: The teeth?
Shephard: Which planet in our solar system features in the name of a former Queen lead singer?
Contestant: Mars.

The Chase, ITV

Bradley Walsh: In 2021 Ben & Jerry's introduced a range of ice cream for what animals?
Contestant: Mice.
Walsh: In a 17th-century Rembrandt painting, a sleeping Samson is resting on which woman?
Contestant: Mother Teresa.

More Media News over ☞

THE END OF SATIRE

"Comedy is now legal on Twitter" – *Tweet by Elon Musk, 28 October*

"Going forward, any Twitter handles engaging in impersonation without clearly specifying 'parody' will be permanently suspended… Previously we issued a warning before suspension, but now that we are rolling out widespread verification, there will be no warning" – *Tweets by Elon Musk, 6 November*

"Comedian Kathy Griffin had her account suspended on Sunday after she switched her screen name to Elon Musk." – *Tweet from CBS News, 7 November*

"Going forward, accounts engaged in parody must include 'parody' in their name, not just in bio… Basically tricking people is not ok" - *Tweets by Elon Musk, 11 November*

ANTI-SOCIAL MEDIA

FROM banning or suspending users who changed their Twitter display names to mimic his, to scrambling to rehire some of the thousands of staff he'd just sacked when he realised they were vital to the business, Elon Musk's first weeks as Twitter CEO have been something of a shitshow.

His flagship change, which he hopes will improve the platform's profitability and address its plague of "bots", "scammers" and "spam", is to introduce an $8-a-month subscription tier which will confer a "verified" badge on users. But reports suggest there won't be any identity confirmation, meaning no one will know whether anyone is who they say they are, badge or no badge. This will be even less effective in tackling misinformation than Twitter's existing method.

And will $96 a year really be enough to deter criminals when the average income from social media fraud is $468? An attempt to introduce an additional marker of identity – an "official" badge – to certain accounts was briefly launched last week but was dropped an hour later in a tweet from the Chief Twit.

Meanwhile, a wave of "verified" parody accounts swept across the platform, with users flexing their new $8 blue ticks to impersonate everyone from politicians to businesses. Verification was "paused" shortly afterwards, leaving no one any the wiser as to how this is meant to work or how it's going to save Twitter from what Musk claims is potential bankruptcy.

"PLEASE note that Twitter will do lots of dumb things in coming months," wrote Musk, and he's certainly not short of ideas.

Schemes mooted have included allowing users to put their photos behind a paywall, reopening the door to Twitter becoming an OnlyFans-style portal for user-generated porn (see *Eye* 1581), the ability to pay to send messages to users via direct message (which sounds like, er, spam), turning it into a payments platform, offering to increase fees paid to content creators, the ability to post longer videos, and even the possibility of putting the whole site behind a paywall.

None of these ideas is exactly original. Speaking on Twitter Spaces, former Twitter engineer Brian Rogers said: "At Twitter we had already researched all these ideas that Elon Musk is coming up with… pretty much any crazy idea you hear about, we've tested it."

It's unclear how many advertisers will stick around while chaos reigns. Many have paused spend, with adland giant Omnicom recommending all its clients cease spending on Twitter until it stops being such a mess. While the advertisers may yet return, it's clear that a platform that allows "The Jews" as a trending topic as a result of a spike in antisemitic content – and recommends Kanye West as a "top follow" on the subject – may have work to do to regain trust. Speaking of which, 15 percent of staff responsible for "trust and safety" were also fired, while Yoel Roth, head of trust and safety, resigned.

OFF YOU ALGO…

24 March: Elon Musk says "the algorithm needs to be open source" when laying out his plans for Twitter.

4 November: Musk dissolves the team responsible for exploratory work in ethical AI and algorithmic transparency.

REACTING to Musk's decision to cull half Twitter's workforce, commentators were quick to draw parallels with another visionary business leader whose abrasive and idiosyncratic style often drew criticism but delivered transformative results.

Shortly after returning to Apple in 1997, Steve Jobs oversaw the firing of 4,100 staff before going on to make it the most valuable business in the world. But there is another potentially relevant precedent: a man who after investing in a troubled digital media business fired 30 percent of its staff in an attempt to turn the company's fortunes around. That man? Rupert Murdoch. The business? Myspace.

LAI'S DETECTOR

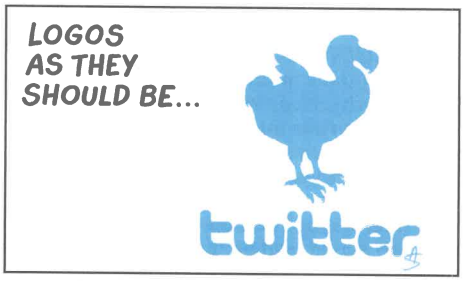
THE publisher of the now-silenced *Apple Daily* is facing trial next month for conspiracy to publish seditious material and collusion with foreign powers, in a test of Hong Kong's new national security legislation. If convicted by a specially selected three-judge court, media mogul and pro democracy-activist Jimmy Lai, 74, who is already in custody, faces a possible life sentence.

Hong Kong's justice department has failed to prevent leading UK human rights lawyer Tim Owen KC from representing him. In September, Lai instructed Owen, whose international experience includes the Hong Kong courts, to lead a team of local defence lawyers. The authorities sought to block the move saying the KC has no experience of new Beijing-imposed national security legislation on which the charges are based, and that overseas concepts of law would be of little help in deciding its scope.

But the Hong Kong appeal court upheld a lower court ruling that it was in the public interest for Owen to attend. The judges said human rights have an international law dimension and the new security law "makes it plain that human rights and fundamental freedoms were to be respected" while balancing the need to safeguard national security.

In any event, said the judges, the case would attract "substantial publicity locally and abroad", and "public perception of fairness in the trial is of vital importance to the administration of justice".

The ruling displeased Beijing loyalists. Former Hong Kong leader CY Leung called it absurd to invite Brits to develop national security for Hong Kong, asking on Facebook: "Does Hong Kong need to follow 'internationally adopted judicial standards' in questions of China's national security?"



"So, Matt, all you have to do is eat this lovely pangolin from a market in Wuhan"

"Mr Zuckerberg has created an alternative reality where people are actually interested in the metaverse"

"Is this where we get our lashes done?"

"It's the Year of the Pig"

■ROTTEN BOROUGHS■

MALIGNANT COMPLACENCY

ASKING about the danger to life from the presence of asbestos in Waltham Forest town hall is "unreasonable behaviour", according to the London borough's Labour leader.

Cllr Grace Williams has warned resident Nick Tiratsoo that if he puts any more awkward questions to chief executive Martin Esom and councillors about the council's asbestos management plan (AMP), he may fall foul of the authority's unreasonable behaviour policy, which "would permit us to place formal restrictions on your ability to contact the council".

In August, responding to a freedom of information request, the council provided Tiratsoo with a copy of the council's 2015 AMP and subsequent reviews up to 2020. Despite the council having a statutory duty to keep the policy up to date, large parts were left blank or not recorded. Local authorities are obliged to report any breaches to the Health & Safety Executive, to which in 2017 Esom was appointed as a paid non-executive director (*Eye* 1583). Tiratsoo wants to know why a Mr Andrew Carr is sloppily listed on documentation as "the environment & regeneration statutory duty holder", given that he left the council in 2015.

Perhaps it's not surprising the council is keen to ensure any investigation into health and safety breaches is done in-house and not independently. To this end, council legal supremo Mark Hynes has been asked to head an investigation, assisted by law firm Clyde & Co. The appointment of Clyde & Co may be linked to the fact that the council risks hefty payouts to staff and public exposed to asbestos in the town hall.

Recently Waltham Forest had to pay a former employee compensation of £265,000, on top of private medical and legal costs, after he was diagnosed with malignant pleural mesothelioma, a devastating form of asbestos-related cancer.

CARRY ON KEMPING

BACK in August *Eye* 1581 reported that Newcastle city council leader Nick Kemp owned a PR company, Nick Kemp Associates (NKA), that specialised in political lobbying and had high-profile clients such as Northumbria Water and construction company Orca.

The Labour councillor lobbied the council on behalf of Orca LGS Solutions prior to the company winning a £2.2m housing contract in 2019. In emails seen by the Local Democracy Reporting Service, he told council officers last year that Orca offered a "fantastic opportunity" and was "keen to develop a strong relationship" with the authority. The council has now halted work and stripped the company of its contract, claiming Orca had failed to match the requirements of that contract.

Allegations that Cllr Kemp had not declared his interest in Orca have been regularly voiced since 2019, despite council officers stressing that he has not stepped out of line and has followed council guidance. But the allegations have grown since Cllr Kemp became leader of the council in May. Last week Lib Dem councillor Greg Stone told the *Times* that what is happening is "worryingly similar" to the storyline of the 1990s TV drama *Our Friends in the North,* which was in part based on the corruption scandal involving T Dan Smith, Labour leader of Newcastle city council in the 1960s.

At this year's Labour party conference, delegates were asked to support a motion put forward by Newcastle central constituency Labour party (CLP) that would see a ban imposed on selecting any candidate for election who works, or has worked in the previous four years, as a lobbyist "undertaking activities for profit and on behalf of a for-profit third party or client in an attempt to influence, or advise those who wish to influence" national or local government. If passed at conference, this would have ruled against Cllr Kemp being allowed to stand for re-election while still running NKA. Clearly the Newcastle CLP failed to lobby enough delegates, because almost 80 percent of them voted against the motion. Lobby on, Nick, lobby on!

TOP OF THE ROTS

THE local government ombudsman (LGO) has resisted all calls to publish league tables of which councils attract the most complaints or have the most complaints upheld against them. In the end, someone did the number-crunching for them.

Birmingham city council, with 3,300 complaints for the period 2016 to 2022, was the worst, according to research conducted by claims.co.uk, a personal injury claims specialist. The LGO upheld 580 of those complaints.

The researchers also worked out the number of complaints per 10,000 of population in the authorities' areas. By that measure, London boroughs provided nine of the worst 10 councils in the country. While Birmingham's complaint rate was 28.9 per 10,000 people, **Haringey** hit 45.3 (1,206 complaints between 2016 and 2022; 226 upheld), with **Lambeth** on 44.7 (1,440; 210 upheld) and **Newham** on 40.1 (1,423; 183 upheld).

The only non-London council to make it into the top 10 was **Torbay** in Devon, with 432 complaints over the six-year period, a rate of 31.7 per 10,000 people.

● **NOT CONTENT with already being a national laughing stock, senior officials at the London borough of Croydon continue to do their utmost to look ridiculous. The council still refuses to publish the Penn Report into the disastrous decisions that led to the council going broke in 2020 (*Eyes passim*), largely on the grounds that the people who bankrupted the borough might sue for "reputational damage". Yeah, right.**

That didn't stop the council publishing on its website two "highly confidential" reports – legal advice relating to the recommendations of investigator Richard Penn over the possibility of fraud during the £67m refurbishment of a council-owned arts centre and the chances of recovering some of the £437,000 golden handshake paid to former chief exec Jo "Negreedy" Negrini. The reports, from a supposedly secret "Part B" agenda to a council committee, were removed from the website six weeks later, but not before hacks at local news website *Inside Croydon* had read them.

The council's response? To threaten a high court injunction against *Inside Croydon* for re-publishing material the council had itself already published!

GRAVES NEWS

IN the summer Sheffield council shut a popular café in the city's largest park at 15 minutes' notice, claiming it was unsafe and dangerous. Twelve people lost their jobs. The Rose Garden café had been a much-loved focal point in Graves Park since 1927.

The council relied on a surveyors' report that catalogued defects and problems with the building going back up to 30 years. Campaigners hoping to save the café have since discovered through freedom of information requests that no significant repairs or maintenance have been done for at least 10 years, despite the authority having received more than £350,000 in rental income plus a share of the profits from the operator, Brewkitchen Ltd. The council continued to be responsible for the maintenance of the building under the lease.

Last week members of the city's finance sub-committee heard that up to 182 council-owned buildings, many of which are iconic and historic, are in a similar parlous state for want of maintenance and will require £200m of investment in the next five years, with £48m of those repairs "critical and essential".

High on the list is the Graves art gallery & central library gifted to the city by philanthropist JG Graves in 1934, which needs at least £30m spent on it. In 2017 *Eye* 1435 reported that the council planned to sell it to a Chinese developer who would turn it into a hotel. Nothing came of that.

Having at last faced up to the scale of the problem, councillors remain without a clue about where the money might come from.

● **ISLINGTON council's answer to the energy crisis is to turn off heating and hot water to tens of thousands of tenants and leaseholders in housing with communal systems between midnight and 6am. The move, carried out with minimal consultation and affecting up to 36,000 properties, has caused enormous distress and inconvenience to shift workers, the elderly and people with medical conditions, such as cancer patients. As one estate manager told the Joe YouTube channel: "The people making these decisions don't live in social housing." The Labour council appears so taken with its brainwave it's now considering turning off the heat between noon and 3pm as well.**

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER

THE LOCKDOWN GAVE US ALL A CHANCE TO REDISCOVER SO MANY ASPECTS OF OUR LIVES. NOT LEAST THE DAILY COMMUTE...
MAX AND I BOTH USE BIKES NOW
BIKES?!? FAR TOO EFFORTFUL. WE USE THE CANAL TO GET IN
AND SALVATORE IS A FULLY QUALIFIED VENETIAN GONDOLIER!

NOOKS and CORNERS

NATIONAL Highways could be forced to reverse the ugly "infilling" of several historic railway bridges, as the emergency powers they used for the works have now expired.

The road transport body, which manages the Historical Railways Estate (HRE), has already been ordered to clear out the horrible mess it made at Great Musgrave, in Cumbria, where planners have now taken enforcement action, after rejecting a retrospective planning application for the works. Eden district council said bunging up the bridge over the former Eden Valley Railway with foamed concrete and structural fill material caused "considerable harm" to the appearance of the bridge, which dates from the 1860s. It also ruined plans to connect two local heritage railways along the route.

BRIDGE OF SIGHS: Barcombe infill protesters

HOT TOPIC: What next for a Liverpool landmark?

Public outcry over the Great Musgrave incident, including from MPs on the transport committee, resulted in plans to either demolish or infill dozens more old bridges, where roads cross over former railways, being put on hold last year. A review of the scheme has since concluded that many of the bridges should be preserved, partly to keep old railway track routes available for national or local cycle routes.

Many of the bridges are also considered heritage assets – such as a large Victorian bridge in Barcombe in Sussex, which spans a path that eventually leads to the renowned Bluebell Railway. Residents were horrified at the infilling proposal, now paused, in their conservation area.

HRE Group, a coalition of heritage, walking and cycling groups, says it has now identified four more places where historic bridges have been infilled using emergency powers – but have not later been put right.

In 2020, contractors for National Highways told Selby district council that the Rudgate Road bridge over the former Church Fenton to Harrogate railway, a skewed brick arch dating from 1847, needed to be filled in under "Class Q" emergency permitted development powers due to an "ongoing and increasing risk to public safety". No specific fault was mentioned, however, and the bridge was assessed as being able to carry 32 tonnes; but £133,000 was still spent on the works.

Class Q powers are meant to be temporary, but despite the problems caused by blocking a planned Wetherby-Tadcaster cycle path along the old track, no further work has been done to relieve the "emergency" in a less harmful way. Selby council told HRE Group an enforcement officer was now investigating.

Similar emergency infills were carried out at Congham Road Bridge, near King's Lynn; on a bridge near Woodham Ferrers, in Essex; and one in Ilford, east London, all of which are now well past the date when the emergency permissions should have lapsed.

As HRE Group's Graeme Bickerdike, notes: "There was no prospect of an emergency developing at these bridges – certainly not by any reasonable definition of the word – and National Highways had no plans to remove the infill within a year as it was obliged to do, by default, under Class Q.

"The company's exploitation of these powers meant that the four infills were not exposed to scrutiny through normal democratic process which, in the case of Congham Road and Rudgate Road, could have identified issues around potential future active travel use. And as Great Musgrave demonstrated, the heritage and environmental harm caused by infilling far outweighs any marginal long-term maintenance cost savings."

THERE was worrying news for Liverpool's increasingly dilapidated Littlewoods building as Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) pulled out of a £70m film studios project last month.

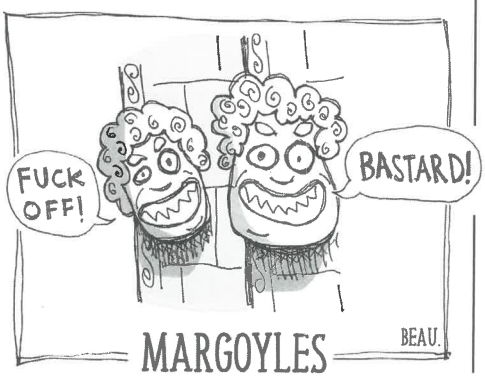
Once home to the Littlewoods football pools, the huge white Art Deco building was completed in 1938 but has been empty since 2003. In 2012, the late Piloti wrote: "Surely Liverpool, which has long had a taste for the megalomaniac, can find a suitable use for this huge, impressive and still potentially useful structure" (Eye 1315).

Current leaseholder Capital and Centric has indeed come up with a scheme on the necessary scale, with plans for a "film studio, commercial, creative employment, and educational space". Unfortunately, just months after the plan was first put forward in 2018, the complex suffered a massive and damaging fire.

A package of public funds from city and regional government has since been put together, with an initial £8m due to be spent dealing with the most urgent repairs to the building, which is now in a sorry state.

LJMU had been attached to the project for some time as an intended "anchor tenant" taking 75,000 sq ft of the enormous scheme, but pulled out in October, saying it needed to focus funds on improving its existing campus. Liverpool city council described the university's decision as "regrettable" but not fatal to the scheme.

Capital and Centric says the film studio is "closer now than it has ever been to being delivered." Here's hoping.



PARKS & WRECKER

TROUBLE in the Peak District National Park, where yet another former business tycoon is making locals miserable with her wacky plans for a beautiful limestone valley bought using a crowdfunding scheme.

The last *Eye* reported unauthorised developments during Covid lockdowns by Emma Harrison, former owner of welfare-to-work firm A4e, at her stately pile near Bakewell. Only three miles away, Rachel Elnaugh is the figurehead for a group that has bought what she describes as an "incredible vagina of land" to use for an eco-community.

Elnaugh was in the original line-up of the BBC's *Dragons' Den* until her own company, Red Letter Days, selling gift experiences, went into administration owing customers and suppliers and was the subject of an investigation by ITV's *Tonight*.

These days she is standing as a parliamentary candidate for the Freedom Alliance Party, formed as a backlash against pandemic lockdowns. Last year she tweeted: "Child abuse. Whitty will hang for this" when vaccinations for children aged 12-15 were announced. She marries these beliefs with a passion for alternative medicine and wellness.

The residents of the village of Cressbrook were alarmed when Elnaugh bought neighbouring Cressbrook Dale after garnering investors via a glossy brochure in which her group, Phoenix Rose, promised a place for micro-freeholders to establish a food forest, camp on the land, gain shamanic wisdom and hold retreats.

Most of the land is ancient woodland, with some grassland which has a low agricultural rating. The dale is designated as a natural zone, reserved for the wildest areas of the Peak District with the heaviest planning restrictions. One section is also a site of special scientific interest. Elnaugh's group has so far paid for a third of the 70-acre site and is due to pay for the rest (a total of £640,000) over a three-year period.

The earliest manifestations of her plans for Cressbrook Dale have been digging up a patch of ground and installing hardstanding for parking, building a gravel pathway and steps, and erecting a tepee and a polytunnel (later damaged by vandals). As a result, the Peak District National Park authority slapped a temporary stop notice on further development and a tree preservation order on all the dale's trees.

Cressbrook Dale

Elnaugh has told followers she's the target of a local hate campaign. The villagers, who have founded a campaign group, Save Cressbrook Dale, deny their campaign is personal, insisting their concern is that a piece of land subject to heavy protections is under threat. John Butler, Cressbrook community chair, told the *Eye*: "This group claims to be eco but they're doing damage. They've bought land completely unfit for their purposes. We want people to come here and enjoy it, not destroy it. There's a very high level of unity against this plan among villagers and the surrounding communities."

In the group's press release, environmental management professor Lynn Crowe explained that this part of the Peak District is sensitive to any disturbance: "This is not farmland, it is designated as a natural zone." The temporary stop notice, she added, was significant as "these orders are rare and only ever used in an emergency".

The *Eye* asked Rachel Elnaugh for more information on her plans for the land, but she replied that she was not "authorised" to give them – and joked that she would sell the land as an eco-hotel.

Letters

letters@private-eye.co.uk

Lookalike

Cobain

Truss

Sir,

I see this is where Liz Truss gets her rock star looks from. Didn't end well for either recipients.

SAM OLLIS.

Unprecedented precedents

Sir,

If we are talking about historical parallels ("200 Years Ago", p7, Eye 1585), perhaps a better one for Liz Truss would be George Canning, whom she displaced as the UK's shortest serving PM ever. Canning died in office after 118 days in 1827, and was replaced by Viscount Goderich, who nobody particularly wanted and who was nicknamed "the blubberer" for his habit of crying in the Commons. Goderich lasted 130 days (making him now our 3rd shortest serving PM) before he was dismissed by the king, which does not bode well for Sunak.

DR RICHARD MILNE.

... I heard a (very witty) talk the other day by young Hague, W. on William Pitt the Younger (one of his specialities) and he pointed out that when Pitt Junior first became PM in 1783 aged 24, he was the 5th PM in 18 months. We've still got some way to go!

DAVID MILNE,

London WC1.

Ex-PM Qs

Sir,

[...] How come Matt Hancock had the whip withdrawn for going on "I'm a Celebrity..." but Boris Johnson hasn't – even though he has been on holiday when parliament is sitting and at the time of writing was intending to wander off to Egypt?

DONATA DALTON.

Farrar horizon

Sir,

In his Pandemic Update (Eye 1584), MD includes a quotation [from Sir Jeremy Farrar, former member of SAGE] stating the UK is "the world's fifth richest economy". This is often said, but is misleading when used as justification for greater spending on health.

Even if one accepts GDP as a meaningful measure, the size of the whole economy is beside the point. The key question is the per capita position. On this, the UK has a less impressive ranking. The World Bank has the UK as lower than 20th in GDP per capita. It is no wonder Germany has far more medics than the UK, given its per capita GDP figure is about one third higher.

ADAM JAMES LEVITT.

Freeman of speech

Sir,

Congratulations to Hadley Freeman for calling out censorship in the Guardian ("Truly, Hadley, Deeply...", p10, Eye 1585). As a columnist, she was apparently allowed to write as a mother, but not as a woman on the trans issue or as a Jew on Labour.

Of course, the trans issue was off-limits – one-way traffic in the Guardian. Eye readers may recall last year's spiteful decision not to include the world's most popular author, J.K. Rowling, in the Birthdays list, presumably because of her heretical views on sex and gender. (No letters of protest were published.) The Guardian is becoming the Daily Mail of the Left – only one opinion allowed.

MICHAEL HOUSE, London.

... Re "Truly, Hadley, Deeply..." and its last para on Adrian Chiles's scintillating columns – congratulations on your timing. Yesterday's Guardian column concerned his cutting up of his supermarket loyalty card. Which, to be fair, was nearly as exciting as last week's piece on his attempts to stop his glasses slipping down his nose. It's almost as if he has taken a bet to see how mundane a subject he can write about and still have it published.

FIONA ALLEN, Edinburgh.

Rays of hope

Sir,

I found it ironic that at the same time as reading Bio-Waste Spreader's article about the need to restrict the use of solar panels on farmland (The Agri Brigade, Eye 1584), I was seeing in the farming press reports from France of exciting and innovative projects doing just that.

It is reported that in the Haute-Saône region, adjustable solar panels have been fitted above land used for cereal crops. The panels are adjustable to track the sun. They can be set vertically to allow more rainfall on to the ground beneath or set horizontally to protect crops from hail or excessive sunshine. They are set high enough so a combine can work underneath them.

With increasing shortages of both food and energy, it should not be production of one or the other. Perhaps we need to look at the French experience and find ways to do both.

ROBERT BARLOW.

... From what I hear from Germany, it is possible to have your cake (or crop) and eat it: reports from Gelsdorf, near Cologne, show that at least one farmer has managed to install solar panels and to maintain an orchard (on the same ground). The opposition suggested by Bio-Waste Spreader need not therefore apply.

PROF GEOFFREY GREATREX,

Ottawa, Canada.

... Bio-Waste Spreader could perhaps have chosen a better example than sheep vs solar farms. UK sheep farming, with over 15 million animals, produces only 1 percent of the country's calories, has a value of £1.5bn at most (UK surfing is valued at £1.8bn) and takes up 25 percent of UK land which they nibble down to the roots. When this is combined with the fact the 90% of sheep farming income comes from the taxpayer, solar panels on some of that land seems quite sensible. From the hills,

TIM GODWIN, Lockerbie.

Wealth warning

Sir,

Paul Wells ("Fossil record", Letters, Eye 1585) is to be commended for the simplicity of his approach in reducing all environmental problems to human overpopulation. Unfortunately, the reality is more complex.

Work that I helped lead for the UN's Environment Programme (UNEP) in 2020, building on analysis by the Stockholm Environment Institute and Oxfam, showed that the top 1 percent of earners (approx. 80 million people) are between them responsible for twice the total carbon emissions of the lowest-earning four billion of the world's population. If "control" is needed, it is best directed at the profligacy of wealthier people.

On his other point about "gluing oneself to things", as an academic who has, outside my day job, had cause to do this in a desperate attempt to get government to see sense on climate action, I can confirm it can be surprisingly effective in drawing the attention of an otherwise supine media machine.

Dr STUART CAPSTICK,

Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations, Cardiff University.

Turbine haul

Sir,

Paul Wells argues that renewable energy sources like wind turbines use "vast" amounts of fossil fuels in their construction, so are not a real solution to climate change. It's no secret that steel is carbon intensive – whether building a wind turbine or a gas or coal plant. The difference, once you've built that kit, is whether or not you go on to burn several million tonnes of fossil fuel a year in it, for the next 25 years. That big difference means wind power emits 99% less carbon per unit of energy output versus coal power, according to the US Energy Information Administration (6 grams of CO_2 for every kilowatt-hour versus 900 grams) – including all embedded carbon throughout the lifecycle of construction, operation, and decommissioning. So no: we don't need Harry Potter to "wave his magic wand" to build wind power, it's all science and just an astonishingly effective was to reduce emissions.

NED MOLLOY, London.

Bang on the money

Sir,

The "Let's get fiscal" Slicker article (Eye 1585) is why our decades-old subscription remains secure... and the cover is pretty good too!

JOHN DAIN, NW Hants.

More Letters over ☞

Lookalike

Grandma

Coffey

Sir,

Why can't I stop myself thinking of Giles' Grandma whenever I see Thérèse Coffey?

SIMON PRENTIS.

NHS plc

Sir,

Ted Townsend ("Going Private", Letters, Eye 1585) says the nature of ownership of hospitals is nothing to be concerned about. But hospitals have been run ever more as businesses for decades, certainly since PFI deals started in the 1990s. A business wants 100 percent bed occupancy (incompatible with being able to cope with disasters and pandemics), maximum productivity from minimum staff, and has every interest in covering up failures.

The appointment of businesspeople to the top of the NHS instead of healthcare professionals, and the squeezing of frontline staff (nurses, doctors, cleaners, admin) is precisely why health services are starting to fail in some instances.

MERLIN READER, London.

[...] As a former healthcare professional, wild horses would not drag me over the doors of a private hospital in the UK, knowing how they depend on the NHS to pick up the pieces (at public expense) whenever private healthcare drops the ball.

The sacred cow of private healthcare in America helps ensure doctors are the third commonest cause of death in the US after cancer and cardiovascular disease, and that US healthcare costs per capita are more than four times what the NHS pays. If we believe in trusting private business with public responsibility, what truly beggars belief is failing to notice how private enterprise of all kinds remains dogged by scandal while systematically evading corporate responsibility.

While I detest public subsidy of private enterprise, I prescribe universal readership of, er, Private Eye at um ... public expense.

COLIN LOVE,
near Ludlow.

Shots fired

Sir,

Regarding the "Apparently" cartoon (p25, Eye 1585), please employ the services of someone under the age of 20. No self-respecting child would refer to a "shoot-'em-up": the correct term is "first person shooter". I would cancel my subscription but my mum won't let me.

ROSINA MURRAY (aged 16),
West Sussex.

Scilly mistake

Sir,

In the Nooks and Corners article about English Heritage's poor coastal management (Eye 1584), you mention garrison walls on the Isle of Wight. Do I assume you mean garrison-walls on St Mary's on the Isles of Scilly?

DAVID EVANS, Bristol.

● *Apologies, yes. Our mistake. Ed.*

Good Cop?

Sir,

As reported in Eye 1585, Devon and Cornwall Police became the latest force to be placed in special measures last month after inspectors found it "does not answer, or respond to, emergency or non-emergency calls within adequate timeframes, and too many calls are abandoned" ("Police News", p9). Here is a link to a BBC local news item on 27 October headlined: "Devon and Cornwall continues to have the third lowest crime rate of the 42 police force areas in the UK" (www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-devon-63418176). Could the two be related?

ANNA MARTIN.

Rather than your assertion that Gurpal Virdi hadn't received an offer to return to the Met because of his past allegations against the force, I can offer an alternative explanation ("Old Coppers", In the Back, Eye 1585). The scheme only applies to officers who retired in the last five years. I understand that Mr Virdi retired in 2012. I did too and I haven't had a letter either.

PAUL STALKER, Suffolk.

Bad Taste

Sir,

The cartoon depicting a defenceless old man atop a bonfire, captioned "Feeling warmer now grandad?" (p7, Eye 1585) reinforces the UK's widespread disrespect for the elderly. Tilt at those who deserve mockery, not those thin-blooded and disabled by age. As my Lancashire mother used to say: "Think on: It will come to you all."

PS: "grandad" should be capitalised when used as a direct address.

JACKIE LLOYD, aged 79,
former lecturer in English, Lyme Regis.

... I have just seen the Fran cartoon highlighting the lateness of an ambulance to save the life of someone who has already been buried (p13, Eye 1585). It made me laugh out loud. More like this please. Renew my subscription at twice the price. I don't need to eat any more with this level of humour.

COLIN ENGLISH, Surrey.

Crimea watch

Sir,

Your recent article on Fifa ("World Cup fever", p8, Eye 1585) notes that Russia hosted the World Cup in 2018, "four years before his troops invaded Ukraine". May I be the 94th subscriber to point out that Putin's troops first invaded Ukraine in February 2014?

That the Russian government was allowed to bask in the warm glow of the 2018 World Cup, four years after its invasion of Ukraine (and 10 years after its invasion of Georgia), is to Fifa's eternal shame.

Keep up the good work.

ED JONES, Edinburgh.

"No, sorry... The Wallace Collection is three doors down"

Pedantry Corner

*... Jim C Wilson ("Eye love", Letters, Eye 1585) suggests the age gap of **nine** years between Angela Lansbury and Elvis Presley - mother and son in Blue Hawaii – was some kind of record. Actually, no. Joyce Royce Landis, who played Cary Grant's mother in North by North-West, was only **seven** years older than the erstwhile Archie Leach.*

JOHN WEBSTER, London.

*... Surely the record referred to by Jim C. Wilson is to be found in The Manchurian Candidate (1962) in which Miss Lansbury plays Laurence Harvey's mother. She was 37, he was 34 (ie. only **three** years older)*

HUGH SIMON, Stockport.

... In the 1958 film The Vikings, Ernest Borgnine (born January 1917) played the father of Kirk Douglas (born December 1916).

JOHN BUTCHER.

... In your article "VAR Ruining Football" Eye 1585, p32), there is a comment suggesting the Germans wish to "take another look at the goal scored by Private Wilkins in the 1914 Christmas Day football match". According to the Regimental log, the goal scorer was Atkins not Wilkins.

PIP, SQUEAK AND WILFRED,
Broadway, Worcs.

Over booked

Sir,

Tom Tivnan provides a good explanation of what "Super Thursday" is ("Thursday's chide", Letters Eye 1585), but I'm not sure he addresses Bookworm's point. Which is: given that bestselling books can be launched any day of the year, why would any publisher choose to release theirs on a day when the competition is institutionally maximised? Bookworm is justified in continuing to raise the issue, and that won't change however close Tom Tivnan gets with his whispering.

JAMES WARD, Wadhurst.

Bible studies

Sir,

... Bit puzzled why you're having a poke at the USA's "Evangelical Environmental Network" ("Climate funding", p40, eye 1585) for their website saying: "As a biblically orthodox Christian organisation EEN totally rejects nature worship and pantheism... we are to worship only the Creator – never His creation. There is only one God in three Persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Last time I looked, this seemed to be a key belief of a religion followed by roughly one third of the planet. You did know that, didn't you?

CHRIS HUDSON, Northumberland.

Had me in stitches

Sir,

I read the entirety of Eye 1585 in one day while recovering from emergency surgery. The sections on the "porridge man" (Funny Old World) and From the Message Boards seriously threatened my stitches. In fact, the whole issue was even more hilarious than usual – or perhaps that was the anaesthetic? Anyway, I want to thank you for a tremendous chuckle during an otherwise grim recuperation. Also, do you do shoutouts? I'll try one anyway: an almighty thanks to the surgeons and staff of STU, Salford Royal, for literally saving my life. Subscription safe in case of further mishap,

ED BARRY, Salford.

WORLD CUP MASSES OF DOHA SPECIAL

WHILE western nations tighten sanctions on Iran over the supply of drones to Russia, the football world is increasing its support for the country with a record payout for playing in this month's World Cup.

Qatar will be the most lucrative World Cup ever, so Fifa is offering a record prize money pool of $440m (up from $400m in 2018). This means that even if Iran go out in the first stage they will receive $10.5m. Qualify for the latter stages and that figure – which includes $1.5m for travel costs – increases significantly.

In contrast, Ukraine, the target for Russia's drones, missed out on the World Cup, having lost a play-off to Wales that was delayed until June because of the invasion. The Ukrainian football association is appalled by the participation of Russia's Gulf ally in Qatar 2022 and said in a statement: "Taking into account the alleged involvement of Iran in the military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, we appeal to Fifa to consider excluding the Iranian national team from the 2022 Fifa World Cup."

The plea was rejected by the organisers. "Please do not allow football to be dragged into every ideological or political battle that exists," wrote Fifa president Gianni Infantino in a recent letter to World Cup teams. So, er, how has that ideal been working out in Iran itself, where the boundary between the political and football elites has been blurred for years?

In 2006, the Iranian football association was suspended from international competition by Fifa over "government meddling" in the removal of its president. Fifa issued another threat of suspension in 2020 amid renewed concern over "political interference" from the Iranian regime, and earlier this year there was an international outcry after female fans were denied entry to the stadium for Iran's home game with Lebanon. Fifa previously spent years trying to persuade the Islamic republic to overturn its law blocking women from attending games. So much for separating football from "ideological battles".

The prize money that the Iranians – and the 31 other teams – are about to receive from the World Cup is generated by Fifa, which is budgeting for $4.7bn in total revenue for 2022, 56 percent of which comes from the sale of broadcast rights. So, with the BBC/ITV joint deal for Qatar costing £80m in total, football on TV in the UK over the coming weeks will be indirectly swelling the coffers in Tehran.

Despot Marketing

THOSE sponsors of the World Cup in Qatar, noted friend of migrant workers, gay people and others…

Coca Cola: "The Coca-Cola Company and our bottling partners believe in creating a safe working environment where 'zero is possible' as it relates to injuries… We do not discriminate against anyone… for any reason, including… sexual orientation."

Visa: "We are committed to providing a safe and secure environment… Visa prohibits any form of harassment or discrimination based on a protected class: race, colour, sexual orientation."

Adidas: "Adidas believes all employees have the right to work in a safe, fair and respectful environment… Our Fair Play Code of Conduct and the policy prohibit all forms of discrimination predicated on any of the following perceived characteristics:… sexual orientation."

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "National Nude Gardening Day is a key part of National Gardening Week," Alice de Wet told reporters in Auckland (NZ), "and this year we're emphasising the importance of healthy soil. Many Kiwi naturists are keen gardeners, and growing your own food is in keeping with their philosophy of living in harmony with nature. Nude gardening lets our members get stuck into the garden while soaking up the sun for a good dose of Vitamin D. All of our club members will be getting it off and getting into the garden to plant an extra row. New members are always welcome and the good news is that the club uniform comes free of charge."

Fiona Arthur of the Yates horticultural company added that "the practice of nude gardening adds a whole new dimension to connecting with nature, but it can be hazardous, so you need to watch out for sharp bits and stinging insects. The day also gives you a good opportunity to find out about the health of your soil. A clean pair of cotton undies should be buried in the ground for sixty days. When you dig them up, the more the undies have deteriorated, the more microbial action and the healthier the soil. Whether you do it with your clothes off or on, make sure you get into the garden on National Nude Gardening Day, to get those gardening jobs done and to connect with nature." *(Stuff (NZ), 22/10/22. Spotter: Andy Thompson)*

● *"When I saw that the mattress company was hiring people 'with a desire to sleep as much as possible', I thought I'd be a perfect fit for the job," Jackie Trost told TikTok viewers from her bed. "I can sleep just about anywhere anytime, I have a sign reading 'Warning: Do Not Disturb, Disturbed Enough Already', and I have even fallen asleep while standing up and leaning against the shower wall. It already looks like I'm doing a good job."*

A spokesperson for the Casper mattress company in Washington D.C. had advertised for professional sleepers, saying "this is not a dream, and this is not a drill. Those appointed to be 'Casper Sleepers' will be expected to snooze in the company stores and in unexpected settings around the world, serving as real-life mannequins and in-house influencers whose catnaps and siestas will be spun into TikTok-style content." Philip Krim (co-founder of Casper) added "Before we started this company, the idea of sleeping on your mattress before you bought it just didn't exist. We took a gamble, and it paid off. We'd underestimated how much people valued the physical experience of mattress shopping. One of our biggest challenges is educating consumers that an amazing mattress can be bought online. Millennials are definitely sharing their love of sleeping online." (The Spokesman Review, 9/8/2022. Spotter: Francis Harvey)

– ● –

● "Using a Freedom of Information request, we have analysed statistics for ferry cancellations since 2009, when CalMac introduced Sabbath sailings," The Rev David Blunt of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) told reporters in his North Uist and Grimsay Presbytery. "CalMac was mocking God when it took its decision to have Sunday sailings to the Western Isles, and our analysis shows that the high number of cancelled ferries on the Sabbath was caused by the wrath of God.

"When CalMac began sailing in the face of opposition, they broke the commandment. That objection to the Sabbath sailing does not change. Our objection is based in scripture, it will always remain. And yet the volume of sailings just increases. It stands to reason that CalMac will have breakdowns, but it has gone against the Will of God. When the Sabbath sailing was introduced, church members warned there would be divine punishment. God is a loving God. God's Will is what we all must do." *(The Courier and Advertiser (Fife), 19/7/22. Spotter: David McIntosh)*

Commentatorballs

£10 paid for contributions

"They're really throwing everything at the kitchen sink"
AARON PAUL, BBC1

"James Maddison's got a bird's eye view of it there as he's lying on the floor"
IAN WRIGHT, BBC1

"He's like the Duracell bunny, this guy – wind him up and watch him go!"
CRAIG HEAP, BBC2

"The team that goes out and executes some of their players, and does it well, will end up winning"
JON WILKIN, BBC2

"Where the bowlers have followed through you can put your finger on a dark patch"
MICHAEL ATHERTON, Sky Sports

Contributors: Peter Sharples, Peter Lidstone, Kalwant Chaggar, Mike Painter, Julian Watson.

Apparently BY MIKE BARFIELD

THE NATIONAL HOMEOPATHIC ASSOCIATION'S ANNUAL MEETING

Rishi Sunak MP The New Prime Minister's Top Secret WhatsApp Group

Hello!

Hello? Hi, guys!

Where is everyone?

Dominic Raab:
Sorry, PM. I was too busy speed-dialling I'm a Celeb to make sure Hancock gets to do the next Bushtucker Trial.

James Cleverly:
Me too.

Ben Wallace:
Me too.

Michael Gove:
Ditto. And double ditto. It's Hancocks's Barf Hour 😃

Why would anyone want to see Matt Hancock eating ostrich anus?

Thérèse Coffey:
Seeing him chewing Gina Lollobrigida in the stationery cupboard was quite unpleasant enough.

This is terrible. Mr Hancock's constituents must be furious.

Thérèse Coffey:
They are. He's only away for three weeks.

The former Health Secretary has become a major distraction from this government.

Simon Hart:
Thank God for that!

Who are you?

Simon Hart:
I'm your new Chief Whip. Remember?

Of course. Sorry I've got jet lag. I've just flown back from Cop27. Look, here's me, taking my rightful place on the world stage! Top left, behind Lithuania.

Michael Gove:
Not so much a photo-op as a photo-Cop! I'm on fire – just like the planet!

Jeremy Hunt:
Prime Minister, I thought you weren't going to Cop at all?

I wasn't. But then I suddenly became aware of a disaster on a global scale.

Penny Mordaunt:
What, Boris was going? 😃

That's not why I went. I went to prove I'm really green.

Penny Mordaunt:
But WE'RE NOT, we don't believe you!

Thérèse Coffey:
If we could harness the energy of all your U-turns we could power the grid for years.

Gavin Williamson:
Shut up, fatso. Smoke yourself to death, why don't you? And slash your throat while you're about it. And you, Jeremy Cunt, how dare you question this week's leader?

Thanks for the support, Sir Gavin. Come on, guys, we've got to be the party of integrity, professionalism and accountability.

Gavin Williamson:
Got that, disloyal fuckwits? Remember, I've got the dirt on all of you. And I've got a spider. 🕷

Suella Braverman:
Why are you being such a rude obnoxious bully? Are you trying to steal my job?

Dominic Raab:
Or mine? I'm a karate black belt and I could kill your spider with one blow!

Gavin Williamson:
Don't call me a bully you scumbags or I'll tell the world all your secrets.

Suella Braverman:
I haven't got any secrets, I've emailed them to everyone already. Marked 'Highly Confidential – Please Delete'.

Come on, guys, this is going to be a different kind of government, we're not just going to fight, do U-turns and sack people all the time.

Wendy Morton:
Gavin threatened me because I wouldn't let him go to the Queen's funeral. And be on telly.

Gavin Williamson:
You fucking grass, Wendy. The next funeral I'm going to is yours.

Simon Hart:
Prime Minister, the optics on this aren't looking terribly good. Recent polling suggests the public aren't awfully keen on foul-mouthed threats and men bullying women.

Oh. That's not good, is it?

Thérèse Coffey:
Fire up the U-turn generator. I can feel another one coming on. This is like the Good Old Days of two weeks ago, with my friend Liz! 🚀

OK. Deep breath. Engage Winchester Head Boy mode. Now, Gavin, you've let yourself down. You've let the school down. And most of all, you've let me down. So, I've got no option but to put you in detention.

Suella Braverman:
We haven't got any room. And the hotels are all full. And he's not even Albanian.

In that case, Sir Gavin, although I appreciate your loyalty and your professionalism and your integrity and your accountability, you're fired.

Gavin Williamson:
No, I'm going to resign. Then I can come back again in a week's time, like Suella.

OK, when I said you're fired, I meant you can resign.

Thérèse Coffey:
Whoof! Another U-turn up the chimney! Keep 'em coming!

Gavin Williamson:
It is with a heavy heart that I feel it is my duty to leave my extremely important position as Minister Without A Clue. I have become a distraction from the good work that this government is doing.

Penny Mordaunt:
What's that?

Oh, come on, Penny, we must be doing something right.

Michael Gove:
Yes, we're sacking Gavin! 😃

Gavin Williamson:
Goodbye. And remember, if you fuck me over, there is a price for everything.

The administrator has removed Mr Williamson from the group, even if he later claims that he removed himself.

Jeremy Hunt:
Is that price linked to inflation or earnings?

Jeremy, you need a break.

Jeremy Hunt:
I can't, we have really difficult choices to make on the economy

Like what?

Jeremy Hunt:
Do we blame Putin, Covid or Liz Truss?

As long as you don't blame me!

Jeremy Hunt:
Only two things are certain in life: debt and taxes.

Mr Hunt has left the group to have a lie down.

AMERICAN MIDTERMS An Apology

IN recent issues we may have given the impression that the Democratic Party was on course to suffer a series of catastrophic defeats in the midterm elections. Headlines such as, "SLEEPY JOE IS DEAD MEAT", "RED TSUNAMI WILL WASH AWAY DEMS" and "SUPER-TRUMP WILL RETURN IN TRIUMPH AND SMASH FEEBLE WOKE OPPOSITION" may have led readers to believe that the results were somehow a foregone conclusion and that the Democratic Party was going to perform poorly in an important test for the president.

We now realise, in the light of actually waiting for the results, that nothing could have been further from the truth and in fact the results were a terrible blow to the Republican Party and ex-president Trump in particular, representing a triumphant vindication of Joe Biden's brilliant campaigning. We hope that today's headline, "LOSER TRUMP WASHED UP AS WAKEY-WAKEY JOE GIVES REPUBLICANS A SHOCK AND ENSURES LIBERAL AMERICA TRIUMPHS OVER MAGA MAD MEN" We apologise to readers for any confusion caused by our previous articles and also for any further confusion when any more results come in and we change our minds again.

THAT TRUMP FATHER OF THE BRIDE SPEECH IN FULL

My fellow Americans, on the occasion of Tiffany's wedding, it fills my heart with joy to see my daughter looking so gorgeous, so blonde, and wow, so hot! But enough of Ivanka. This is more than just a wedding to me – this is also an alibi for when the January 6th Committee subpoena me. Because if I'm here, then I'm not flushing top secret documents down the gold-plated john.

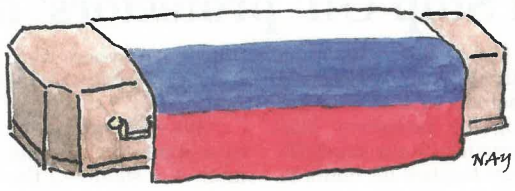
And today, I am not so much losing a daughter because the Donald doesn't lose. No way. She was stolen from me. Just like the midterms. And the previous election. This time, I had all my selected Maga Trumpians standing for the GOP across the nation, but sadly, because of irregularities such as women voting, Crooked Hillary, Sleepy Joe not being asleep and the votes being counted, they lost. These candidates were MY guys, and there comes a time when you just have to accept responsibility. And I accept that the person responsible for this crapfest is my wife. It's not the first time Melania's made a catastrophic error of judgement! So don't blame it on the Donald, don't blame it on the sunshine, don't blame it on the moonlight, don't blame it on the New York Times, blame it on the boogey-man: Rudi Giuliani.Yes! It's all Rudi's fault, as well as Melania's!

But today is not the day to apportion blame to other people for my mistakes. I did that yesterday and I'll do it again tomorrow. This is a traditional wedding, so of course we had something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue – the Senate! And that is so not my fault! Fake lose!

So be upstanding and charge your glasses – to a shell company in Panama that the IRS will never find out about – and let's toast our great victory in the midterms, my even greater victory when I lose in 2024 – and let's show our love for the glamorous blonde whose big day this is. Me.

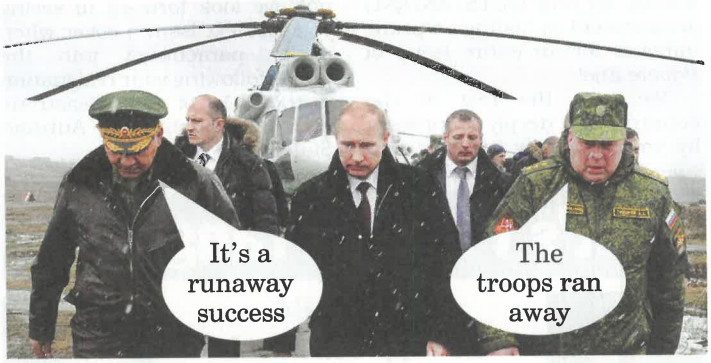
You may now kiss the bride and my arse.

Donald Trump
45th and 47th President of the United States



Gen Z

UKRAINE WAR LATEST: RETREAT TO MOSCOW



Keir Starmer WRITES

HELLO! As you know I have a five-stage plan for my Labour leadership. It goes thusly:

1. Reform Labour to become a proper mainstream party again.
2. Take the fight to the Tories
3. Make Labour look like a government in waiting.
4. Watch as Labour tries to tear itself apart in a self-indulgent frenzy.
5. Go back to stage one.

So, with the news that Jeremy Corbyn is being urged to challenge Sadiq Khan for the position of London mayor, I can see we're comfortably entering stage four!

There may be a few of you alarmed at this development, but let me assure you that the very idea of a disgraced MP becoming London mayor and using that position as a way to leap-frog his way to the leadership of the party and ultimately becoming PM is ridiculous! There's just no precedent for that at all! (citation needed).

I'm sure he'll put up a good fight in the process, after all he does have a great affinity for London. Russians still control huge parts of the City, and they also still control huge parts of Jeremy's brain as well!

But I'm sure he won't do such a silly thing. After all, the thing about Jeremy is, he's a loyal Labour man through and through. Some people say to me, "Don't worry, Sir Keir, just look at his record: Jeremy would never do anything to make things easy for the Tories at the expense of Labour. He would never congratulate independent candidates on defeating Labour candidates, or challenge the leadership for no good reason, or vote against Labour Party policy, or ignore conference votes when he doesn't agree with them!"

Phew! I was worried there for a second!

Sincerely, Keir

ATLANTIS HAILS PROGRESS AT COP2700 BC

by Our Man From Atlantis **AA Gills**

THE island state of Atlantis, host of this year's Cop2700 BC, reported excellent progress had been made in the fight against rising sea levels.

The President of Atlantis, Mr Kredulos, congratulated the conference for a really constructive dialogue with realistic target setting, and attainable goals.

He thanked the leaders of Ancient Greece, Minoa, Mesopotamia and Persia for their commitments to slowing the process of climate change due to the release of carbon emissions following the discovery of fire a few million years earlier (*Is this right? Ed.*)

"We are confident," said Mr Kredulos, "that smaller island nations like ours can avoid the dangers of excess flooding thanks to the generous and considerate behaviour of the rest of the known world."

He continued, "I'm sure that with these sincere promises and pledges of long-term action we can avoid glug, glug, glug."

THE EYE SAYS

CONGRATULATIONS, Rishi Sunak, on your OUTSTANDING achievement in lasting as prime minister for an entire issue of *Private Eye*!

We, like the rest of the country, are deeply impressed by your longevity in office and sincerely hope that you will still be with us after your tough but fair budget this week.

Good luck, Mr Sunak and, if not, we look forward to seeing you on next issue's cover when you're parachuted into the jungle following your resignation in the wake of your disastrous and ill-thought-out Autumn Statement.

Let's Parlez Franglais!

Numero 94

Le rapprochement between les leaders de the Royaume United et la France

Rishi Sunak: *(pour c'est him)* Monsieur Macron! Je am delighted to shake votre main!

Emmanuel Macron: Qui est you?

Rishi Sunak: Hahaha! Je suis le Prime Minister de l'Angleland.

Emmanuel Macron: Madame Truss? Vous avez changed quite un morceau!

Rishi Sunak: Non, elle est ancient histoire. She était dans Numero Dix un week ago.

Emmanuel Macron: Le Prime Minister Nouveau est arrived! Comme le Beaujolais!

Rishi Sunak: Hahaha! Nous sommes dans agreement deja!

Emmanuel Macron: Ami or foe? Est le jury still au-dehors, comme Liz Truss a dit?

Rishi Sunak: Non, nous sommes friends. Nous have si beaucoup dans common. Les shiny souliers. Les shiny suits. Les smiles glissants!

Emmanuel Macron: Vraiment, c'est comme looking dans un mirroir! Nous sommes comme deux pois dans un pod.

Rishi Sunak: Et nous sommes tous les deux tres unpopular! Perhaps, un deal entre nous would aider notre standing dans les polls.

Emmanuel Macron: Ah, maintenant vous parlez mon language. Franglais! Alors, il faut discusser le tricky sujet des petits bateaux plein de migrants dans la Manche Francaise.

Rishi Sunak: Mon policy normal avec tous les situations problematiques est de jetter beaucoup de cash dans leur direction generale.

Emmanuel Macron: Magnifique! Donnez moi quelques grands boatloads de cash et alors presto! Comme magic, le problem est sorted. Les matelots Francais will faire leur job pour un change. Les gendarmes Francais aussi. Et peut-etre votre Office de Home pourrait do the same.

Rishi Sunak: Pas de chance. Suella Plusbravehomme est totallement useless.

Emmanuel Macron: Ah! Donc next time, elle will be Prime Minister! Hahaha!

Fin

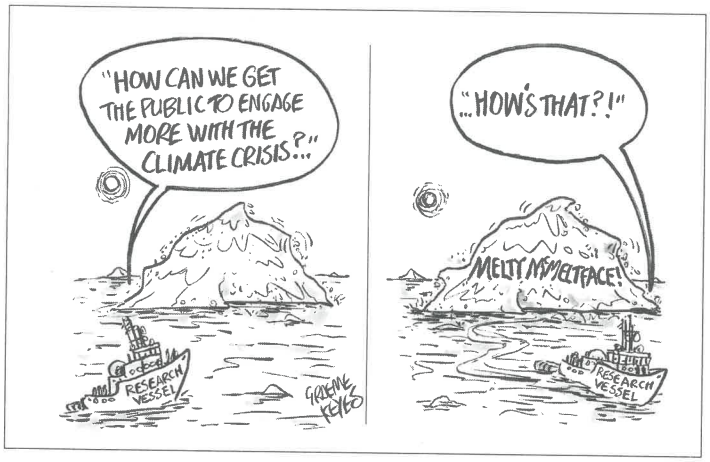
MANSTON THEN AND NOW

1940

The Few, stopping invasion

2022

The Many, described as 'invasion'



COP27 UPDATE

1.5% COMMITMENT FROM RICH COUNTRIES

IN WHAT is seen as a major breakthrough, rich countries at Cop27 have committed to keep 1.5% of the promises they made at the conference about limiting temperature rises in the next twelve months.

"This is a massive increase on the 0.1% of promises they kept after Cop26 in Glasgow last year," said a weeping Cop27 spokesman.

Asked what residents of low-lying countries threatened by climate change should do in the meantime, Cop27 delegates unanimously agreed that it should either be backstroke or front crawl.

THOSE ALTERNATIVE FUEL SOURCES TO GAS IN FULL

- Offshore wind
- Solar
- Burning Cop climate change conference brochures

Climate protestors trying to save all life on earth really annoying, agrees everyone

by Our Protest Correspondent
Glue Edwards

It has been universally agreed that the climate protestors, who are pointing out that if we carry on like this our entire planet is toast, are very annoying. Aren't they infuriating!

I mean, yeah, they're very young, so they can be forgiven for being a bit silly – unless you count all the old ones, of course, who are probably just exaggerating things, the old dears – and yeah, they're very posh, which is also annoying although admittedly everyone's got the right to an opinion, and admittedly they didn't actually do any damage to those paintings because they were covered in glass, but you know, they might have done if some of the soup had magically gone through the glass, and yes, individual tiny actions like these protests are a drop in the ocean compared with the very real prospect of species going extinct and the planet heating up and cooking us all and billions of people being driven from their homelands, sure, but...they are ANNOYING, aren't they?

Holding up traffic? So annoying! I mean, yeah, obviously travel is a huge part of it, but you know, let's just stick our fingers in our ears and agree how annoying they are, and maybe the problem will completely solve itself because we've agreed we are a bit irritated with these studenty types! Phew!

'Just Stop Oil' protestors' fury

'Just Stop Oil' protestors planning to bring the M25 to a standstill have reacted furiously after discovering the motorway was already permanently at a standstill.

"We were trapped for hours in a tailback by junction 9 trying to make our way along the M25 to junction 16 where were planning to bring the M25 to a standstill," said one.

"We will not allow the M25 to scupper our protests by being more at a standstill than we can make it," said another one *(cont. p94.)*

The Eye's guide to the key moments in The Crown

FACT OR FICTION?

DID Prince Philip have an affair with Marilyn Monroe in 1974 after he and the Queen attended the Royal Premiere of *The Seven Year Itch?* **YES**

DID the Queen deliberately set fire to Windsor Castle in 1992 for the insurance money? **NO, OF COURSE NOT** – it was the Queen Mum trying to pay off her debts to a gambling syndicate run by Frank Sinatra on behalf of the Mafia.

AT Charles and Diana's wedding, the so-called "Red Wedding", were all the guests deliberately poisoned to make way for Prince Andrew to become King and sit on the Iron Throne? **YES**

DURING her affair with famous heart surgeon Christiaan Barnard-Castle, was Princess Diana allowed to "have a go" at preparing the aorta of a nine-year-old orphan, miraculously saving his life and earning herself the title "Queen of Hearts"? **YES**

IS Elizabeth Debicki, the actress who plays Lady Diana, getting so famous that she's going to be hounded by the press and will become the subject of the new Netflix series in which she is played by Lily James, then Olivia Coleman, then Imelda Staunton and finally Miriam Margolyes? **NO**, now you're being silly. Clare Foy will play the young Debicki and hand over in series two to Eddie Izzard.

DO Netflix give a monkey's about whether any of this nonsense is true as long as everybody is watching it? **NO**

"Hi, I'm Austerity Man"

The Secret DIARY OF SIR JOHN MAJOR KG aged 94¾

Thursday

I was not inconsiderably incandescent with rage when I sat down to watch the new series of the historical TV drama The Crown with my wife Norman.

Hardly had the series started than the factual inaccuracies began. Oh, yes! The opening scene with the royal yacht Britannia featured three-quarter-inch rivets on the forward poop deck, when in fact, as everyone knows, five-eighths of an inch is the standard issue riveture for naval vessels with displacement tonnage greater than or equal to 74,000.

I was explaining this to Norman when she left the room to make a cup of cocoa. When she returned, she had missed the scene in which Prince Charles plots to assassinate his mother by enrolling the KGB and hiring the Jackal to poison her corgis.

She did, however, catch the scene where I appeared and, according to the, in my judgement, poorly-researched and wholly misleading script, told Prince Charles that I would instruct M15 to assist in his matricidal plot.

"This is totally ridiculous and unbelievable," I said to Norman. She said, "Yes, they've cast that good-looking young actor Johnny Lee Miller as you. How preposterous is that?" I said, "No, I think that is in no way outlandish, and is entirely credible casting. I wonder who they'll pick to play my Secretary of State for Eggs, will it be Pamela Anderson?"

At which point Norman unfortunately must have tripped over the remote control as she accidentally poured her cup of not inconsiderably hot bedtime beverage all over my head.

I do hope this incident in my life is more faithfully represented by posterity in any forthcoming series of The Crown. Knowing them, they will get it all wrong and use Earl Grey tea instead of Cadbury's Cocoa! Oh, yes!

Han-z-z-zard

SPECIAL

Those Sunak PMQ zingers in full:

On the immigration crisis: "Manston may be overcrowded, as the Leader of the Opposition suggests, but it would be even more overcrowded if you had Jeremy Corbyn in charge, which we nearly did three years ago!"

On the nurses strike: "The Health Service may well be on the point of collapse, as the Leader of the Opposition suggests, but I won't take a criticism from a man whose party once had Jeremy Corbyn as its leader although they have since replaced him!"

On the cost of living crisis: "Yes, interest rates may well be going up along with prices, as the Leader of the Opposition suggests, but who knows whether they would be going up or down if Jeremy Corbyn was prime minister, which he wouldn't have been because he didn't win the election!"

On the resignation of Minister without Portfolio, Gavin Williamson: "Yes, I shouldn't have appointed him as the Leader of the Opposition suggests, but at least I didn't appoint Jeremy Corbyn to be Minister without Portfolio in a Conservative cabinet, which Labour would have done, but in a Labour cabinet. And probably not Jeremy Corbyn because they got rid of him. If you get my gist."

On the rollout of fibre optic cable broadband in Norfolk: "Yes, it may be slow, as the Honourable Member for Norwich South suggests, but imagine how much slower it would be if Jeremy Corbyn was personally digging up the road with a shovel and putting the cables in by hand, which is the sort of thing he would do if he was employed by BT Openreach. Only he wouldn't be putting in fibre optic cable, he would be putting in turnips. Like on his allotment. Thanks, team." *(continued ad nauseam)*

NEW FROM GNOME

THE KWASI KWARTENG HINDSIGHT GOGGLES

Have YOU messed up spectacularly?

AND now want to explain it away? With these incredible **Kwasi Kwarteng Hindsight Goggles™** you can suddenly see exactly where everyone else went wrong and why it was their fault!

Made from revolutionary new PolyTeflon and utilising the latest in Chinese retrovision tech, the KKHGs will ensure no blame gets through the lenses to YOU, whilst revealing all the terrible errors you somehow didn't spot at the time!

TV's Kwasi Kwarteng says: *"I should have got these a month ago but Liz Truss stopped me!!"*

THOSE PROPOSED NEW PEERS IN FULL

The Boris Johnson Resignation Dishonours List

Baroness Fruitella of Tottington *(age 23)*
Formerly Deputy Assistant Head of Wine Suitcase Replenishment in Number 10 Downing Street (March 2021-May 2021)

Lord Spaddy McSpadface of That Spad *(age 22)*
Formerly Assistant Deputy Secretary of Song Selection on Karaoke machine in Number 10 Downing Street (November 2021-December 2021).

Dame Mad Nad of Toady Hall *(age not available)*
Famous romantic novelist and part-time Culture Secretary. Best known for her books, *The Beauty and the Bozzer*, *Etonians Prefer Blondes*, and the raunchy *Plans for the Privatisation of Channel 4 and the BBC*.

Baron Stanley of Johnson *(age 94)*
For his hands-on approach to gender equality in the House of Commons.

Lord Wilf of Johnson *(age 3)*
Why the hell not? This is my list! I used to be prime minister.

Lady Jennifer of Arcuri *(36-24-36)*
For services to amalgamating the IT and pole-dancing industries.

Lord Carphone of Warehouse *(02758, your call is important to us, please hold)*
For provision of holiday services on the island of Mustique to the underprivileged and destitute (the prime minister).

Lord Fuck of Bollocks *(666)*, Formerly editor of the *Daily Mail* and veteran of previous nomination lists rejected by the Committee for Undoing New Titles Sensibly (CUNTS).

"Turns out 'forever' is the running time"

ONE DIMENSIONAL PORTRAYAL OF CHIEF WHIP 'RIDICULOUS'

by Our Political Staff **Tim Whipman**

FORMER fictional Chief Whip Francis Urquhart has lambasted the one dimensional portrayal of an evil former Chief Whip.

"The way Gavin Williamson portrays a Whip in the current series of the UK Parliament is utterly ludicrous. It's an insult to the intelligence.

"The preposterous suggestion that Chief Whips are sneering pointy-toothed creatures using childish threats and gossip as a weapon to blackmail Tory backbenchers into line is absured.

"And the fact that he owns a spider called Cronos and has a real whip on his desk is a ridiculous fantasy – it's an eight-year-old's idea of what a chief whip is like.

"As for the ridiculous idea that I leaked his texts to get rid of him, well you might say that, but I couldn't possibly comment," Urquhart said, murdering a Tory MP who'd *(cont. p94.)*

Open marriage

Top media couple **Phil** and **Phillipa Space** talk frankly about the subject that's on every couple's minds.

A few years ago, as a happily married couple, we discussed having an open marriage.
Yes, we certainly did, dear.
It's all about trust and communication. And we both agreed it was a bad idea.
Oh...
What do you mean, 'oh'?
Is that what we agreed?
Well, I thought we did. Are you telling me you had an affair?
I thought you said it was all right? Because you said you fancied Brad Pitt.
I didn't mean I was shagging him. He was just on telly.
Oh, I seem to have got the wrong end of the stick.
Who was it, you bastard?
I'm not saying I slept with Sandra from Design.
Sandra! That cow?
It meant nothing. It was after the Christmas party.
You bastard!
I was drunk.
In that case, I don't feel so bad about Trevor.
What! Trevor from Marketing? You never!
Might have. Three times. And sober.
Well, that's it, we're finished!
What, the marriage?
No, writing this article.
Oh, do you mind if I write another article about open marriage with someone else?
Of course.
Is that a yes or a no?
It's a definite... (continued p94)

Lord Lucan story spotted in newspaper

A story about a man who's a dead ringer for how Lord Lucan would look today has once again been sighted, this time on page 7.

The story looks 100 percent identical to the story about a man who's a dead ringer for how Lord Lucan would look today, which was itself spotted in another newspaper on page 5.

Said one article recognition expert, "These Lord Lucan stories do indeed look strikingly similar and, more than that, they are identical to a Lord Lucan story that popped up two years ago, hidden away in an Australian newspaper."

Said another prominent Lord Lucan story-watcher, "I've been following Lord Lucan stories ever since they were first sighted in the mid-1970s and I have to say this latest sighting is the most convincing yet that hacks trotting out nonsense stories about Lord Lucan are still at large, though the story is getting so old that surely it will be dead soon."

Lord Lucan was not available for comment, but someone who looks vaguely how Lord Lucan would look today if he was still alive and had had a sex change and full face transplant agreed to talk to our reporter. She said, "Go away."

Dead Rotters

The Eye's Controversial New Columnist

The columnist who has never apologised for acting like a big baby in a restaurant

This week I am delighted to be given an honour in Johnson's resignation honours list. I can see there are already sneering leftie rival newspapers who imply my title of 'Lord Baby of Sodor' was given just because of my unstinting and fawning support for the former prime minister in my column. Not so. I have worked assiduously behind the scenes for the good of this country, helping the toyshop, baby food and pram industries. My patronising of local services is second to none; if I hadn't spent all those 50 pences sitting in the Noddy car ride outside Sainsbury's, they probably wouldn't have been able to afford to introduce their new £52 pound coupon scheme for starving families. Also, I am a great supporter of the environment. If I didn't do my plop-plops in my Pampers pull-ups, there would be even MORE poo pumped onto our beaches by South West Water! So, you can see that I am a pillar of society, and am more than qualified to sit on those red leather benches, where I will fall asleep and *(cont p94)*

£35bn failure of Test and Trace

by Our Covid Correspondent **Pam Demic**

THE Covid Inquiry has heard a strong condemnation of Test and Trace after it was revealed that, despite being given £35bn of public money, it had been unable to find any trace of humility in Matt Hancock.

"You would have thought that, given his multiple failures as health secretary, the huge death toll, the cronyism and the fact that he had to resign in disgrace for breaking the lockdown laws he created, it would be able to find some shame," insisted one panel member.

"But it found no trace of humility, shame or decency as Matt Hancock pocketed £400,000 for a couple of weeks in the jungle, directly against the wishes of the bereaved families of Covid victims."

Elon Musk ruining Twitter, users warn

by Our Twitter Correspondent **Rhea Tweet**

TWITTER users have expressed their worry that the website known across the world as a forum for reasoned debate and calm, sensible exchange of accurate information and informed views has overnight become the worst place on the internet.

"It's now toxic and unpleasant," tweeted one user, **@sadBoy97** to his seventeen followers, "as opposed to how it was before Elon Musk, when it was a happy place full of nice people trying to make the world better."

"No it wasn't, you wanker," said another user, **@truthwarrior44**, "We spent the whole day screaming at each other about Donald Trump and Piers Morgan and Katie Hopkins. It was great."

Another user, **@Contrarian Librarian**, added, "Actually, you stupid fascists, it was always a horrid place where disgusting people even gave spoilers to Game of Thrones and I had to tell them to stop or else they'd die of cancer."

A fourth user, **@elonmusk**, joined to say, "Shut up you paedos, or give me $8 a month".

@sadBoy97 summed up the situation by threatening to leave Twitter for the thirty-seventh time, "I am going to join an exciting new website aimed at young men in their bedrooms, called MasturBate, instead" (*Surely Mastodon? Ed*).

Banks defend lending Musk $11bn to buy Twitter

by Our Social Network Correspondent **Len K. Dinn**

SENIOR bankers standing on the window ledge on the 83rd floor of a New York skyscraper have insisted they do not regret their decision to lend the petulant, narcissistic billionaire $11bn to buy Twitter and own the libs.

"Elon had a very clear business model of sitting on Twitter all day like some weirdo incel living in their mum's basement and announcing changes to the site on a whim depending on who made fun of him," said the bankers.

"We're certain this is a winning strategy to get our investors' billions back."

"If Elon continues to screw up running Twitter, he'll probably jump before he's pushed, much like us."

Twitter users 'urged to try alternative'

by Our Social Media Correspondent **Judge Tinder.**

TWITTER users angry at Elon Musk's purchase of the social media site have been urged to try an alternative called "going outside and having a walk".

"Going outside and having a walk involves stopping endless doomscrolling through your Twitter feed, switching off your laptop and your phone, walking up to the front door, opening it and going outside," said one former Twitter user out for a nice walk.

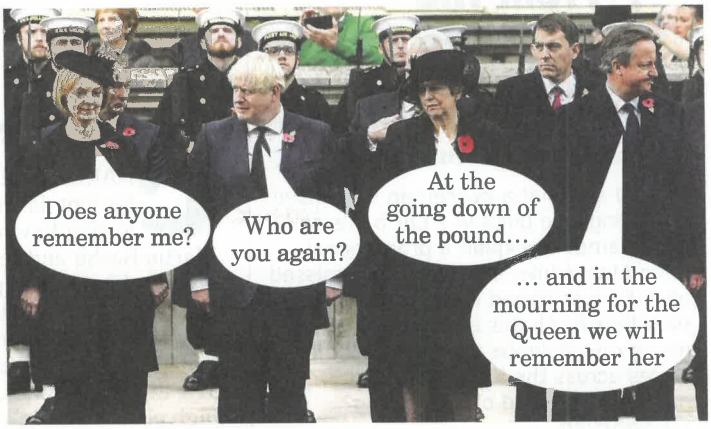
"The walk can then take you to 'the pub', a place where you can interact with people you barely know, just like on Twitter.

"You can also get into silly fights about politics here too... but, as there's booze, there's also the chance of a drunken sing-song and a snog with someone you fancy if they 'like' you in real life at the end of the evening."

Some tweeters are predicting that 'the pub' could be the future of people being social once they abandon Twitter doomscrolling and go get some fresh air.

THE RED WAVE

REMEMBRANCE DAY


Does anyone remember me?
Who are you again?
At the going down of the pound...
... and in the mourning for the Queen we will remember her

THE FALLEN

CONSPIRACY UPDATE

Well, the US midterms are upon us again, and the question on all of our contributors' lips, is of course – how much have the Democrats rigged the vote this time?

'TRUTHTELLER69%*&$' has this disturbing anecdote on his blog that shows just how large the problem is:

"I rang the Michigan authorities and was told I WASN'T ALLOWED TO VOTE in the mid-terms on account of I was a British citizen who lived in Dudley, in the West Midlands."

"This denial of my vote suggest the DEEP STATE is ALIVE AND WELL and intent on stopping decent law-abiding lunatics like me voting."

QANON fan MAGA435 is quite livid! He has posted this on Facebook:

"Litrally everone I know voted for Republican! Both my parents and ALL the guys in my survival compound! How can Doctor Ozzy loose Penisylvania? It is compleetly unbeleevable that we didn't win. We stod on a compleetly sane platform of pro-life accept in the case of Nancy Pelosi's husband."

He continues with a theory:

"I have a theery that all the women got together and VOTED WITHOUT TELLING THERE HUSBANDS. This is completely agenst all the ruling of the SUPREEME court which states: no woman can seek to abort a republican candidate once he/she has come to term. LOCK THEM UP!"

The mystery continues...

That crypto crisis explained

THE world of crypto has been rocked by an extraordinary collapse this week. Here – in simple terms for non-crypto investors – is the timeline of the collapse:

MONDAY Activity as normal on the investment platform BATMAN. $194 trillion traded, which is roughly average for a Monday

TUESDAY Tremors shake market when BATMAN crypto platform issues warning over new coin BIGFLOP, formerly valued at $29,000 but actually worth only $0.84 by end of day

WEDNESDAY Charismatic 12-year-old CEO of BATMAN platform, Dex Squillion, reveals all currency on BATMAN had been traded through a BIGFLOP porthole in order to securitize itself, while maintaining relations with PHRAUD trading house and pegging portfolio to crypto production house SKAMM.

THURSDAY Jitters turn to panic as BIGFLOP loses further value ($0.03), and it's CEO, four-year-old Croesus Richly, reveals he has been grounded by his mum until further notice for crashing six major economies.

FRIDAY Trading down 38,000% and contagion spreads through economy as World Bank reveals it had put everything on BIGFLOP thinking it couldn't be any more dangerous than normal markets. Mass panic grips globe.

MONDAY Trading begins again and new wave of investors pile in to new crypto currency CRAPTO, shoring up prices and ensuring that this time, THIS time, it's going to go really well and we'll all be rich for ever.

From The Message Boards

Members of the online community respond to the major issues of the day...

Police accused of misconduct

Guys, I see that a policeman is accused of getting free pints in a bar by using false names to exploit a promotional offer. Meanwhile, a PCSO was dismissed after he was filmed masturbating on a park bench. All this as reports reveal misogyny, violence and criminality in forces across the land. Whatever happened to good old coppering? – ***Bogbrush***

My husband and I are in our sixties and have many hobbies, including real ale, non-league football, swinging and dogging. I've never been in the police, but I've had a few police in me. 😉 They're terrific sports and always bring their handcuffs and truncheons along to charity events. That PCSO was one of my webcam regulars and I was sad to see him sacked over such a small thing. – ***Gilfy Gracie***

As a serving officer, I'm embarrassed for the hobby bobby in the park. A proper copper would have threatened the man who filmed him with the Counter Terrorism Act or the crime of voyeurism, then taken his phone and deleted the pictures. Wankers like him make a mockery of the force. – ***Easy Peeler***

Being ex job myself I feel for the poor fella filling out forms to get a drink. I remember a time we never paid for anything. Drinks in the pub, on the house sir! Ethnic takeaways, take your pick boss! It was service with a smile... or else! They call it "corruption" these days, but it was just old fashioned good manners. – ***Brian***

You hear a lot about 'canteen culture' and 'toxic masculinity' but it's easy to give a dog a bad name (just ask Guy Gibson!). When I was a young PC there was nothing 'PC' about our nick and every locker was covered in girly pin ups. The exception was a new chap who had naked crime scene photographs of Jack the Ripper's victims. Feminists will say what's the difference, you were all treating women like pieces of meat, but we knew a wrong 'un. Sure enough, he had nude snaps of kids, old ladies, dwarves and all sorts. Bang to rights! But no, turns out he was writing a book about the Whitechapel murders, and the snaps were from his naturist caravan club. Went on to head up a big force up north. – ***plodding along***

The police put their jobs and our lives on the line every day and they see the very worst of humanity. – ***Please Police Me***

yes old bill see the worse of humanity, thereself's! 😃 – ***hatfield gooner***

Great stuff guys! – ***Bogbrush***

THE KING OF TROUBLES

A short story special by Dame Hedda Shoulders

CHARLES smiled to himself as he put his foot down on the throttle of his Racing Environmental Green Aston Martin Bashir and accelerated up to a bracing 17mph. The power surged through the organically reconditioned engine fuelled by his own unpasteurised Cornish Claret and gluten-free Trescothic Camillabert… Yes, thought Charles, his own Royal brew of high octane wine 'n' cheese was not only ecologically sound but living proof that one could enjoy motoring in a classic car and yet also save the plane while doing so in a very real sense…

As he sped through the ancient Clotswold lanes passing the villages of Clarkson St. Jeremy and Chipping Graham Norton he couldn't help but think that it was all going rather well, this monarchy thingie. He had already met more Prime Ministers than his mother – well, very nearly – and world leaders flocked to his palace to hear his totally impartial views on the virtues of solar-powered thatch roofs and sustainable vegan trousers. The only fly in the Royal Duchy Original ointment (£87.50 from LadyinWaitrose) was this frightful *The Crown* telly business, but even that seemed to be playing out in a satisfactory way. All the media seemed to be siding with their new King against the vicious caricature and pantomime villain in this very unfair portrayal of the unfortunate tampongate business which was all a long time ago and er, er, er, er, er…

The car bumped noisily over an elderly eco-protestor who had superglued herself to the gates of Highprice House. Charles waved at the high-viz bibbed senior citizen who waved back merrily with the hand that was not attached to the iron railings giving the King a traditional V for Vegetarian salute. How delightful his people were thought Charles. She was just like the charming gentleman who had generously thrown him an organic long-range egg, no doubt to go with his favorite breakfast soldiers from the 27th/31st Royal Toasters.

As he drove passed the ornamental ha-ha and the Tree Palace built for the young princes in the ancient oak tree, he could see the familiar figure of Sir Alan Fitztightly, his aide-de-campsite and Chief Equarius waiting for his arrival. The last of the Fitztightlys greeted the new Monarch of the Glen with a mischievous smile.

"What's up, Sir Alan ?" Charles enquired. "What isn't up, Sir Alan?" replied the senior courtier and newly-appointed Serjeant of the Stinkwell tartly. " What a question, Sire! Why, Backstairs Billy himself would have blushed to be asked that even in the days of your dear old nan". Charles, however, was in such a good mood that even this vulgar badinage failed to dent his humour.

"Very good, Sir Alan," he replied "We are amused".

As the two men wandered into the ornately decorated Ante-Smoking room, Sir Alan suddenly addressed Charles in a grave manner.

"I thought I should alert you to a story in todays papers, Sire."

Charles' ears turned the colour of the fertiliser-free beetroot that was growing in the Greenwash House.

"Yes," Sir Alan continued. "It says the King has been caught with large bags of cash from the Sheikh of Shaydi Arabia and he has embarrassed his son and the entire family is in disgrace".

The blood drained from Charles' face and he sat down heavily on the Louis Armstong-Jones chaise-longue.

"That really is… no, I am not allowed to say that any more… but it is… What on earth is one to do?"

"Well," said Sir Alan impishly, "you can thank your lucky stars it isn't you and get on the phone to old King Carlos of Spain and tell him that he has been a complete chump!"

Relief oozed through Charles' veins like a healing nettle'n'toadstool bath balm (£98.75, LongWaitrose) as he realised he had become the butt of another of Sir Alan's wearying jokes at his expense…

Outside, the lone piper was playing a mournful lament that sounded awfully like the theme tune to that terrible docufictiondramatainment thingie *The Crown*… *(To be continued...)*

Opera funding cut

It *is* over when the fat lady doesn't sing

TV HIGHLIGHTS

Don't Carry On, Nurse!

Nurse: One out, all out!
Patient: Are you talking about my organs?!

Made for TV reboot of the black and white comedy classic in which the nurses at St Innuendo's threaten to "down tools", "pull out" and "not take things lying down", only for management to laugh at them.

Things get worse when Health Secretary Sid James (played by an in-form Steve Barclay) makes an improper suggestion and is told "your package isn't big enough."

The strike begins, but can the nurses keep it up? Or will they just be given the clap again?

Don't miss the classic scene in which Nurse Bigguns asks hospital administrator Mr Weeny, "Is that a pay rise in your pocket or are you just pleased to see me?" To which he replies, "No, it's a gun, the army are being brought in to do your job," adding "Carry on Sergeant."

EYE RATING:
You won't be in stitches.

COST OF LIVING SPECIAL

This year's Top Ten must-have Christmas presents for kids:

- A personalised IOU
- A Wombles VHS from Oxfam
- Your child's old bike, only repainted
- Miniature biro from the Argos store
- Sachet of tomato ketchup from McDonald's
- A collection of Sudoku puzzles cut out of the Metro
- Your very own natural wood stirring stick from Pret a Manger
- Vintage bobble hat found at the back of the bus
- A pet woodlouse in its own stylish matchbox
- A freshly remaindered copy of Matt Hancock's new book

QATAR OPENING CEREMONY

PREMIER LEAGUE CONDEMNATION

THE Premier League has condemned Qatar for its repressive and backwards attitudes to homosexuality.

"Gay men in the kingdom being too scared to admit what they are, living a life of lies, is just horrible," said a Premier League spokesman. "It's hard to imagine a place where you are too scared to admit your sexuality for fears of a backlash."

"We're just lucky that, of the 557 strapping, young, super-fit, hunky male athletes playing in the Premier League, none are gay. Not even one! Such a stroke of luck, really."

QATAR WORLD CUP

An official guide to culturally sensitive goal celebrations

UNACCEPTABLE

ACCEPTABLE

Advertisement

PANINI FOOTBALL WORLD CUP STICKER ALBUM

Price: £2022

CELEBRATE the world's greatest footballing tournament with this exclusive must-have collection of all your favourite teams.

Week by week collect stickers of all the teams of migrant workers who have died during the construction of the Qatar World Cup stadiums and related infrastructure.

Hours of fun, as nobody knows quite how many stickers there are. Anywhere between the official figure of 0 and *The Guardian*'s estimate of 6,500.

TEAMS INCLUDE: India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

TV's David Beckham says: *"Collect all the stickers and you'll have the most comprehensive collection of human rights abuses in any football tournament ever. Wow. Except possibly Russia last time. It may cost a huge amount of money to collect them all, but not as much as I'm getting from the Qataris."*

THEY THINK IT'S ALL OVERPRICED. IT IS NOW!

Your Panini Football World Cup sticker album does not include strikers, because no one has the right to strike in Qatar. Except policemen who are allowed to do it if they see you holding hands.

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Leslie Phillips, actor and legendary screen Casanova.

So. Farewell
Then Leslie Phillips
Star of the 'Carry On' films.

Now, sadly, you will no longer be
Carrying On

You were Mr Bell in
'Carry On Nurse,'
In 1959

Which is when you first uttered
Your immortal catchphrase,
"Ding Dong!"

Which served you so well
For the next
63 years.

But now, alas
The bell
Is tolling
For thee.

E.J. Thribb
(Certificate 17 ½)

How is the Queen now?

THE GNOME'S ASTROLOGER **HORACE COPE** FINDS OUT

Well, luvs, I've clambered over those glittery pearly gates, and I'm very glad to say Her Majesty is still bearing up incredibly well despite being dead!

She's currently watching an ethereal edition of the Royal Variety Performance with Leslie Philips, Bill Treacher, Tom Owen and Cliff Richard. And before you write in, luvs, I know Cliff is still alive – God lets him in from time to time for good behaviour!

She loves all those showbiz types up here, my dears and *(Continued p94).*

DIARY

***There's No-One Quite Like Grandma* by St Winifred's School Choir (1979)**

You've been up all night, your shirt is drenched in sweat, blood and tears, in that order, you've been rockin' narrow and hard, rockin' hard and steady and drinkin' and smokin' what your doc told you so many times you shouldn't, when who comes through that door of yours but Grandma, the woman who used to wash you and bathe you and swaddle you in your manger under the watchful eyes of the Archangel Gabriel, if he just happened to have dropped by that bright sunny day.

There's no-one quite like grandma. You sure as hell know there ain't, she's the lady who gave birth to your mom and your mom gave birth to you, with a little help from your pappy, so now there's no givin' up on grandma and that's a fact.

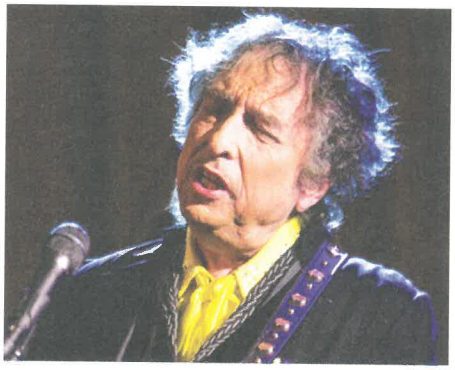
Who's St Winifred? She's a saint and she has a school and that school has a choir. That much we know. And Winifred knows we know. And she's got a thing for your grandma, Winifred wants to get it on with your grandma, go a-kissin' and a-tumblin' and a-whoopin' and a-whoppin' with your grandma, so what right have you to stop her after all your grandma's done for you? None at all. Grandma, we love you. She always is a friend to you. And she's a friend to me. So no wonder she's so pissed at you. Get up off that floor, pal, dip that head of yours in ice-cold water, and wipe the blood and the tears and the sweat away. It's time to act like a man in front of the Grandma who raised you and taught you virtue.

God Save the King (1745)

Once you wanted to save the Queen but she couldn't be saved so now you want to save the King, and I get it. We all got to save somebody, and if it can't be the Queen then why shouldn't it be the King, when's he ever done you wrong?

King Kong. Nosmo King. King Crimson. Carole King. King Lear. Kings of Leon. Solomon King. We Three Kings. Pearly King. Ben E. King. Burger King. There's jist so many Kings on this planet we call Earth.

The choicest gifts in store, on him be pleased to pour, long may he reign. Straight



THE PHILOSOPHY OF MODERN SONG by BOB DYLAN

talk, eyeball to eyeball. But you know what, there's only one throne, and no matter how many Kings and Queens you have, there's only one ass can sit on that throne at any one time, so you don't want him to reign too long, else the queue for the throne could stretch right round the block.

So here's what I'm thinking. This song is always sung so slow, so whiny, like the people singing it would rather be anywhere, doing anything, than here and singing this song. Not being a slug myself but having nothing against our tough-skinned gastropod mollusc companions, I'd still describe it as sluggish. I guess that somewhere deep down within their hearts they don't want him or her to be saved, because they just can't wait for the next King or Queen to come along, so's to liven things up.

***Wannabe* by The Spice Girls**

What do you want, what do you really really want, from this ever-dwindling life of yours that is being lived by you and only you in this place, now? Flying too high can be dangerous, one bad move leads to another, and that move is usually worse than the one before. It that means anything, it means a lot. And if it means nothing, it means even more.

The universe is a place of mystery but you can count on The Spice Girls to tell you what you want, what you really really want. You wanna go back to happier times, where folks are lively and merry, where you can play with a full deck and shuffle 'til your hands turn blue and the universe belongs to you, where you can bait your hook, cast your net, sail around on your skiff and be a seadog with no fear of hitting that iceberg that has loomed up on you unexpectedly, the way icebergs always do.

Come on now, let's pull together, let's not take things for granted. If you wanna be their lover, you have got to give. Taking is too easy. But that's the way it is. Least, that's what they say, and who are we to disavow them? It worked for David, it might work for us. Yoked together, one flesh in perpetuity. In the Bible, God chose to wager with Satan about the piety of Job. I guess in His wisdom He would never have put a dime on Sporty, Scary, Posh, Ginger and Baby, with all their zigging and their zagging and their zagging and their zigging but, come on now, how the hell would I know?

***Ernie (The Fastest Milkman in the West)* by Benny Hill (1971)**

Milk is white and nutritious and it tastes damn good too, leaving white all around your lips so's you have to rub it off with your sleeve or another fabric-based item close to hand. Yet there are more songs about silk than about milk so why should that be? You can't drink silk and you can't wear milk but I know which one I prefer.

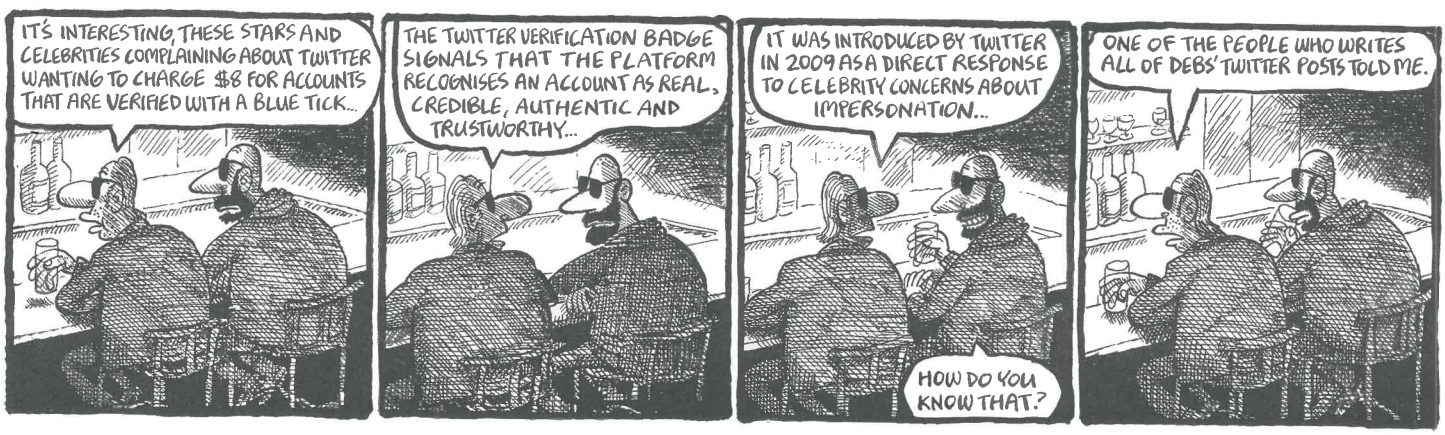
This is a song in praise of milk and those who deliver it. It was released in the year Jim Morrison passed away. No need to light Benny Hill's fire, baby, he sings like there was no tomorrow and no yesterday but only today, no matter how much it may mess up the timetable of this hard-rockin', hard-tootin' cart-drivin' milkman.

Ernie, Sue at Number 22, Two-Ton Ted from Teddington and Trigger the horse, all friends of mine, galloping out of a song that speaks with heart and soul of the unquenchable human need for milk delivered daily. It's the right stuff. It's the white stuff. It's milk.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


IT'S INTERESTING, THESE STARS AND CELEBRITIES COMPLAINING ABOUT TWITTER WANTING TO CHARGE $8 FOR ACCOUNTS THAT ARE VERIFIED WITH A BLUE TICK...
THE TWITTER VERIFICATION BADGE SIGNALS THAT THE PLATFORM RECOGNISES AN ACCOUNT AS REAL, CREDIBLE, AUTHENTIC AND TRUSTWORTHY...
IT WAS INTRODUCED BY TWITTER IN 2009 AS A DIRECT RESPONSE TO CELEBRITY CONCERNS ABOUT IMPERSONATION...
HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?
ONE OF THE PEOPLE WHO WRITES ALL OF DEBS' TWITTER POSTS TOLD ME.

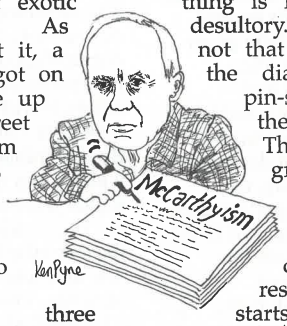
Literary Review

Portentous, moi?

The Passenger
Cormac McCarthy
(Picador, £20)

BACK in the early 1990s, when Cormac McCarthy was delighting punters with such novels as *All The Pretty Horses* (1992) and *The Crossing* (1994), several homegrown critics sat down to analyse the nature of his appeal to UK readers.

The consensus was, in the end, rather banal, and involved an admission that the greater part of it rested simply on his being American and writing picturesquely about exotic stateside locales. As somebody once put it, a sentence like "He got on his horse and rode up the long main street into America" (from *The Crossing*) has traction. A sentence like "He got on his bicycle and rode across the bridge into Kent" does not.



Well, nearly three decades have now passed and McCarthy's once-fertile pen has slowed down a bit. His last novel was *The Road* (2009), and at 89, *The Passenger* and its shorter companion *Stella Maris* (due in December) will probably turn out to be his last major assault on Mount Olympus. And here we are back in McCarthy-land, which on this occasion takes in the ground-down Louisiana-to-Tennessee-by-way-of-Alabamy south and the misadventures of Bobby Western, a salvage diver bidden to investigate a drowned charter plane, one of whose passengers has gone missing and whose flight recorder has mysteriously disappeared.

Men with badges are, naturally, taking an interest. There are callers at Bobby's apartment, which gets turned over in his absence, and a hurried removal. Meanwhile all the front-of-house action – the novel takes place in late 1980, by the way – is interspersed with hallucinatory excerpts from the short life of sister Alicia, with whom Bobby may very well have had some kind of incestuous *thang*. Oh, and descending gently – sometimes not so gently – from the sullen Dixieland sky is the metaphorical fall-out from old man Western's career as a war-era nuclear scientist.

For a 400-page novel, everything is more than a mite desultory. The problem is not that people talk – for the dialogue is usually pin-sharp – merely that they talk too much. The moment that, say, grandma sits down to tell Bobby how her grandpa built the house that went down beneath the reservoir or someone starts descanting on their choice of automobile ("It's not as fast as a Boxer. Or a Countach. But it's better built. Things don't fall off it. Mangusta? Maybe. Goodlooking car. Nothing can outbrake it", etc) the reader knows it's time to switch off the phone and cancel the rest of the afternoon's appointments.

Nothing wrong with garrulity, of course. The bits where Bobby spends three pages obliquely chatting up a waitress ("I didn't know if you was some kind of smartalec or something/But you do now/Sort of. I got to go") or has dinner with his idiosyncratic chum Sheddan are full of good stuff but somehow hang suspended above the wider intimations of threat and discomfort.

Elsewhere, nearly everything that one has come to expect from a McCarthy novel is present and correct, from the chapters done *in italics* to the verbless sentences making great use of the word "it" – "The heavy unending wall of it" (of a wreck the boys are salvaging); "The weight of it [ie water] moving over him" – and the queer little gazes back in time, as where Bobby unearths a stash of gold coins in his grandfather's derelict house and goes around the south selling them to dealers a handful at a time.

No doubt about it, *The Passenger* is "about" things: family, the past, the bomb, the consequences of bygone bad behaviour working themselves out – all those hot topics that great writers love to chew over. In the end, though, there is a way in which nearly everything on view here reduces itself to a question of style. Let's finish with the two sentences that bookend the novel: a) *It had snowed lightly in the night and her frozen hair was gold and crystalline and her eyes were frozen cold and hard as stones*; and b) He knew that on the day of his death he would see her face and he could hope to carry that beauty into the darkness with him, the last pagan on earth, singing softly upon his pallet in an unknown tongue.

Fine writing, no doubt; but Larry McMurtry (*The Last Picture Show*, *Lonesome Dove*) did the same kind of thing with considerably less portentousness.

Books & Bookmen

■ AT LAST there's independent testimony that Boris Johnson's enthusiasm for Shakespeare – or for the Bard's usefulness in gaining his own ends anyway – is genuine.

In the latest iteration of Andrew Gimson's life work of chronicling the former prime minister's career, the biography's section on Johnson's lover Jennifer Arcuri notes that he would recite poetry to her as a seduction technique – specifically *Sonnet 29*, which begins: "When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes/I all alone beweep my outcast state" but ends with the speaker "at heaven's gate" whenever he thinks of his beloved, and scorning "to change my state with kings".

The choice of poem and timing are puzzling. Johnson's affair with the tech temptress, during his second term as London mayor, coincided with one of the few periods when he *wasn't* in total disgrace; and when the affair and his favours to Arcuri were exposed in 2019, she would come to be a reason for him being restored to the doghouse, not his salvation from it.

BARD SELL

■ THE Bard himself, meanwhile, turns out to have a new agent. Sort of. His unlikely posthumous choice is Andrew "The Jackal" Wylie, the notorious serial poacher of the literary *crème de la crème*.

In a recent interview, Wylie explained that his formal connection is with the RSC and specifically its edition of the first collected works, the *First Folio*. Through better exploiting the RSC logo, he said, he will "get back the royalties for Shakespeare that he was deprived of because he didn't handle his business like Walt Disney."

Given that Shakespeare's plots were either stolen or taken from uncredited historical sources, and he was accused ("an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers") of jackal-like behaviour himself, perhaps he might not after all be spinning in his grave at this development.

'Bookworm'

However it's also a platform for Heston's ideas – an often-abstract food philosophy that touches on health, mood and the senses, and is informed by psychology, education theory and particle physics. At its heart is the dichotomy between "doing" and "being" and the way this relationship plays out in cooking.

Waitrose Weekend magazine on Heston Blumenthal's new cookbook

But the image of the worm was indelible: there was something disruptive, almost avant-garde about its appearance on the red carpet, situated as it was between the weirdo vividness of "The Masked Singer" and the jovial abjectness of Viennese Actionism. It was as if, consciously or not, she was helping to underscore the endless heavy lifting that a certain kind of femininity requires.

NAOMI FRY on Heidi Klum's Halloween costume, *The New Yorker*

Pseuds Corner

Others have wondered if turmoil in the sector [US TV chatshows]... is a sign of some deeper conversational malaise.

EDWARD HELMORE, *The Guardian*

Where were you happiest?
In the womb, I guess.

Swedish writer ANDREAS MALM, *New Statesman*

TREE CLIMBER Must be willing to climb only. No coming back. (Those are Tree Descenders, not our game.) Skill set must include ability to live in a tree forever. Also, no visitors. If you are wondering what all this is about, no wondering. Now it's true. I can give you a boost, three sandwiches, a poncho, but after that you will never see me or anyone else. Up you go.

Notice in *London Review of Books* classified ads

Revolver is that significant – a moment in western culture as pivotal as Beethoven's Eroica, Presley with Hound Dog, Stravinsky's The Rite of Spring; the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Duchamp's Fountain, Manet's Le dejeuner sur l'herbe and T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land.

DAN CAIRNS on "the inside story of The Beatles' greatest album", *The Sunday Times*.

Contributors: Chris Rundle, Ben Behrens, Rhoda Koenig, Dafydd Price Jones, Strobes, G.R. Brabant.

£10 paid for all entries

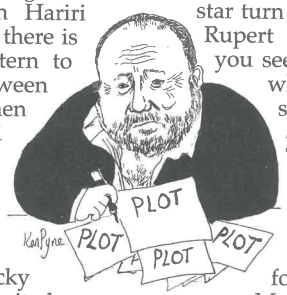
More Literary Review over ☞

Toxic schlock

The Great Reset, and the war for the world
Alex Jones
(Skyhorse, £22)

ACCORDING to Alex Jones, the gravel-voiced US conspiracy-monger, the world is facing a "Great Reset". That reset is, he writes, an attempt by a shady cabal of internationalists "to achieve an unprecedented amount of control over your daily life." To make sure he has the reader's undivided attention, Jones warns that the whole thing "is a war to control the future of human development and capture control of the human species".

These evil internationalists are, according to Jones, a group of technocrats and money men who have swilled around the world stage for the last 80 or so years. These evil plotters have names such as Kissinger, Rockefeller, Yuval Noah Hariri and Soros (and yes, there is an unfortunate pattern to those names). Between them, these men have spawned and sustained a new global elite, at the centre of which is the World Economic Forum at Davos.



For anyone lucky enough to be invited, Davos is essentially a piss-up in a posh ski resort. Jones's view is somewhat different. The man who runs the thing, Karl Schwab, may look like a common-or-garden egg-head but, we learn, he is in fact a very evil egg-head, bent on global destruction. "Schwab and his Davos gang are interested in wiping out every one of the previously existing social structures that have guided the development of countries and nations," says Jones.

He quotes from one of Schwab's books, singling out a passing reference to "more agile forms of governance". The phrase sends Jones into a horrified tizzy. "What are these 'more agile forms of governance'?" he demands to know. "Summary execution by firing squad without the benefit of a trial?"

The globalists have no moral centre, says Jones, and seeing as "God was the original insurrectionist", it is up to every decent, freedom-loving citizen to stand up to the evil Davos cabal. They will take away your cars and your petrol, restrict your food supply, invent fake pandemics, lock you in your home, turn all money into digital tokens so your bank accounts can be frozen and — oh but this book is just so *exhausting*. So, so exhausting.

If you have not heard of the author, lucky you. A preposterous, ranting fatso, Jones is from the internet's nether regions. Essentially a man with a website – the idiotically-named "Infowars" – he's made his reputation by parping out a vast, toxic guff-cloud of paranoid nonsense about lefty plots. This book is a distilled version of his bizarre world view, in which every government employee is a Hitler, anyone who wants to improve society is a fascist and our future will consist of "Karl Shwab, or his downloaded brain, giving us all orders from his laptop".

Jones then, is a maniac. As nice as it would be to pull the lever and flush him into the septic talk of history, he is not so easy to dismiss. A glimpse at the back cover of this book reveals a set of glowing endorsements. "If Alex Jones is just a crackpot," one reads, "why are the most powerful people in the country trying to silence him?" It continues: "Maybe Alex Jones is onto something."

That glowing endorsement comes from Tucker Carlson, the star turn on Fox News (prop: Rupert Murdoch). Jones, you see, has powerful fans who've noticed the sizeable, Trumpy audience he's built. They want to keep him onside.

The quote now looks somewhat embarrassing for Carlson – and Murdoch. For years, Jones promoted a vile conspiracy theory that the Sandy Hook shooting, during which 26 people were murdered, most of them small children, had been faked. The grieving parents were actors, he said, and the whole thing had been staged to justify a left-wing attack on people's gun rights. The parents sued and won. The court ordered Jones to pay damages of $1bn. That amount could rise further.

So Alex, it turns out, is *not* "onto something", and no one in their right mind should touch him, his website or this book with a bargepole. But this deranged nonsense does serve one purpose. It is a warning. The Americans are in the midst of a culture war, stoked by odious loudmouths like Jones and his buddy Carlson. The results include an increase in social division, the 6 January Capitol riots and a delusional young man attacking Nancy Pelosi's husband with a hammer.

There are people in the current Westminster government, and on Fleet Street, who have flirted with the culture war – some even whipping off their undies and hopping straight into bed with it. But as this book makes clear, culture war, with its "us-and-them" rhetoric, is an attack on the stuff that holds societies together. As someone once nearly said: trying to win a culture war is like trying to win an earthquake. Britain should steer well clear.

KLASS ACTION

■ MYLEENE KLASS has a book out about practical life skills called *They Don't Teach This at School*. In it the ex-Hear'Say member (*a popular musical combo, m'lud*) boasts how she's raised her children to be capable and entrepreneurial.

This is probably why Myleene has been using her Instagram account to hawk all manner of things, including Skechers trainers and the very same boasty book. Alas, she neglected to tell her many followers her "recommendations" were paid marketing, omitting the now-mandatory hashtag #ad. Presumably they don't teach the art of the shill at school either.

'Beyond the Wand' by Tom Felton (aka Draco Malfoy)

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

EVEN amid the carnage of Arts Council England's funding cuts, the biggest casualty, English National Opera (ENO), stands out, losing the entirety of its annual £12.6m National Portfolio grant.

As this column has often argued, the regime of chief executive Stuart Murphy and board chairman Harry Brunjes has been incompetent, with poor decisions on repertoire and casting, the alienation of staff and performance nights turned into a circus of D-list celebrities bought in with free tickets for bogus glamour.

A few weeks ago Murphy, perhaps sensing the disaster to come, announced his departure. Rather than now fall on his sword immediately he is brazening things out, saying he'll stay until the middle of next year and claiming to be leaving ENO with a future that has "never looked more secure and exciting" – this amid the near-certainty of eviction from its London Coliseum home. Murphy and Brunjes have continued to issue deluded statements about the "start of a new chapter" – while begging the culture secretary to intervene.

There was talk of relocation to Manchester – which, however, already has Opera North on its doorstep and doesn't need another opera company. The only hope for ENO is to bring in new management that can rebuild the relationship with Arts Council staff. Otherwise this once great company may have no future.

IF THE punishment of ENO is understandable, social engineering criteria have clearly trumped artistic excellence elsewhere in Arts Council England's funding decisions.

As O'Boulez reported in *Eye* 1560, ACE has previously made clear that organisations failing to meet diversity targets "will lose funding". Presumably this is why the Britten Sinfonia, which is lauded for excellence in both performance and outreach and provides music to the east of England, lost all its grant as a National Portfolio Organisation. Yet the Chineke! orchestra, while a welcome initiative to promote BAME players in classical music, was upgraded to NPO status despite not offering the same outstanding quality (and suffering internal tensions to boot: see *Eye* 1584). It will now get an annual £700,000 – almost as much as the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, which gives more concerts and at a higher level of sophistication.

The London Sinfonietta, a flagship of contemporary music, has also lost 40 percent of its funding. This while the National Football Museum – which could easily be supported by wealthy clubs – nets £1m and the Blackpool Illuminations nearly a quarter of a million.

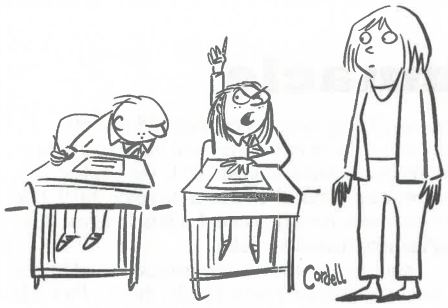
FLEXIBILITY helps in the music industry, as the career of Paul Pacifico shows.

He once ran the Featured Artists Coalition, lobbying on behalf of the performing and creative musicians who get exploited by everybody else, then the Association of Independent Music (AIM), where he lobbied for the independent record labels who do at least some of the exploiting. When he recently announced he was leaving, it looked as if his next job would be running the British Phonographic Industry, lobbying for the big labels which exploit the most.

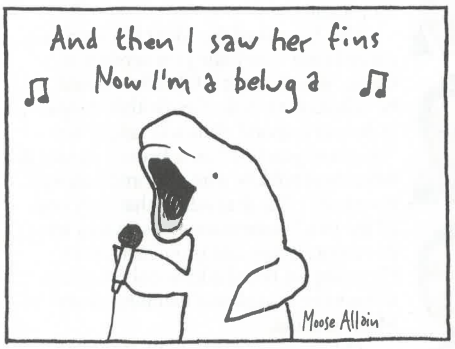
But Pacifico's shift in loyalties turns out to be even greater. An advocate of civil liberties and champion of diversity who has said he wanted his next job after AIM to be "meaningful and worthwhile", Pacifico is about to go and work for, er, the government of Saudi Arabia, running the Music Commission attached to the Ministry of Culture.

This is the same government which, as attested by Amnesty International, imprisons composers and performing musicians who dare to point a finger at Saudi Arabia's lamentable record for human rights. No doubt the salary will make the job "worthwhile". But little else commends it.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

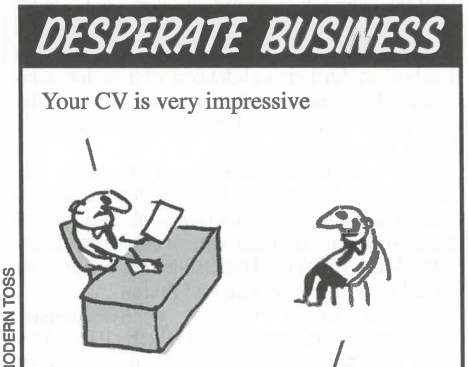


"Miss! Ferguson is infringing my copyright"



"Your starter for ten, Mr Paxman"

"Is that a new style of vape?"



JON & MICK / MODERN TOSS

IN THE BACK

MIGRANT PROCESSING

Mitie misery

THE broken asylum system is certainly working for the private company whose job is to run the government's pisspoor migrant processing centre at Manston in Kent, Mitie Care and Custody Ltd.

The company, part of the Mitie outsourcing giant, began running the centre in January. For some reason it was handed the contract by the then home secretary Priti Patel, not long after a previous Mitie-run "intake unit" in Dover had been deemed "not fit for purpose" (*Eye* 1567) and less than a year after the chief inspector of prisons had reported in unflattering terms on its largest immigration removal centre at Harmondsworth, near Heathrow.

Though the number of detainees at Harmondsworth had fallen thanks to Covid, allowing staff to care for them "reasonably well", in April last year chief inspector of prisons Charlie Taylor said serious failings remained. The centre was "prison-like", with detainees "still locked in their cells for significant periods". The facilities were "rundown and the general environment was bleak and dispiriting". Toilets were in "particularly poor condition" and food was "of generally low quality".

Taylor also found that "the lengthy detention of people with substantial vulnerabilities who had, in some cases, been declared unfit for detention, was also a serious concern".

No surprise, then, that when numbers of detainees aren't favourable – with 4,000 recently crammed into Manston *(pictured)* against a capacity of 1,600 – under Mitie's stewardship things turn *really* unpleasant. Infectious diseases including diphtheria appeared and the chief inspector of borders and immigration said conditions left him "speechless".

Why Mitie keeps winning these contracts despite its track record is unclear. In 2018 Taylor's predecessor reported on Harmondsworth: "For the third consecutive inspection, we found considerable failings in the areas of safety and respect." Again, "detainees, many identified as vulnerable, were not being adequately safeguarded", with some "held for unacceptably long periods". Just a couple of months after that stinker of report, Mitie Care and Custody began a new half-billion-pound contract awarded by the Home Office for holding and transporting detainees across the country.

All this works well for the company's bottom line. In the year up to this March, its income increased 34 percent to £116m, with a matching rise in pre-tax profits to £7.6m.

On the back of this, a failing asylum system is paying off for the executives. Total pay for Mitie Care and Custody's three directors, led by managing director Danny Spencer, shot up 40 percent thanks to £298,000 in "long-term incentive schemes" linked to rising income. Life is sweeter still in the main Mitie group boardroom, where chief executive Phil Bentley bagged a 34 percent pay rise to £3.9m last year.

The poor saps dealing with the appalling conditions at Manston and elsewhere fare less well. Median basic full-time pay is £22,724, significantly below the average UK wage and just 1/161st of Bentley's wedge. Not exactly Manston-like conditions in the Mitie boardroom, then.

Outsource of shame

MANSTON isn't the only part of the asylum system under stress in the UK. Last month, asylum seekers were turfed out of a large property in Acton, west London, run by Clearsprings on behalf of the Home Office, when the contract expired, disrupting the lives of residents and the healthcare and schooling that support them.

Residents at the property, which provided basic cooking and laundry facilities, were given a fortnight's notice of the move but no clue where they would be sent. According to Home Office guidance, "the overriding principle when allocating accommodation is that it is offered on a 'no choice basis'." Three coaches duly took 172 inhabitants to a hotel in Ashford, Kent, with no self-catering possibilities, while others were dispersed via taxi to alternative accommodation.

The "no choice" principle pays scant regard to personal circumstances; hence 15 young children who had been settling well at Acton's John Perryn primary school suddenly had to find new schools, new uniforms and new friends in Kent. While Home Office guidance says account "must be taken of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the UK", there was little sign of this in practice. Nearly all those at Acton had already been moved at least once before. For other residents, NHS appointments also had to be applied for from scratch in Kent.

In 2012, processing of asylum seekers was privatised via geographically-based contracts. These were renegotiated on 10-year terms from 2019, with Serco taking the Midlands, east and north-west England, Mears taking Northern Ireland, Scotland and the North-east, and Clearsprings allocated Wales and southern England.

The contracts were initially worth around £4bn in total, but inflation and the number of asylum seekers have both risen since. Clearsprings' profits to January this year jumped from £4.4m to more than £28m, while dividends grew fourfold. Operating profit has risen from 2.9 percent to 6.7 percent; return on capital employed was 96 percent compared with 25 percent the previous year. Other firms saw their profits rise too.

Although Clearsprings claims that "local authorities are always consulted extensively on the location and operation of accommodation, to ensure and promote harmonious integration of the company's service users with the wider community", protests from local councils don't seem to bear out that. As one volunteer at the Acton property said: "They were dispersed by the company contracted to the Home Office in the most inhuman way I have ever witnessed in this country."

FOOD SAFETY

Flesh wounds

WITH avian flu reaching such devastating levels that turkeys probably would vote for Christmas and new requirements for farm veterinary inspections coming in next month – on top of a vast expansion in certification needed for exports post-Brexit – the last thing the meat industry needs is regulatory chaos. But that's what it's getting.

In January, *Eye* 1565 reported how the Food Standards Agency (FSA) proposed to bring back into the public sector up to 50 percent of the country's "official veterinarian" (OV) work, in which qualified professionals ensure abattoirs and other meat production facilities operate cleanly. The move came after years in which the process had been outsourced to a single monopoly supplier in Leeds-based Eville & Jones Ltd, whose long record of exploiting its position by underpaying vets and avoiding tax the *Eye* had exposed.

Rounding off E&J's unimpressive record, ahead of Brexit the company had ignored concerns over the number of vets – who largely came from southern and eastern EU countries – that would be available for the increased workload. Cue what the FSA called a "critical shortage of vets" once the inevitable happened.

To deal with this, in January the FSA announced an "operational transformation programme" to build a "sustainable, resilient and flexible frontline workforce", based on employing half of official vets directly by 2027. This would "increase our control over our resources and set the FSA on the right path to adopting a longer-term strategic resourcing model".

All very sensible – but now, following an FSA board decision last week, it's not happening after all. A spokesperson told the *Eye* the FSA was "minded to put on hold its project to directly employ some official veterinarians… given the severe pressure public finances are currently under, and inflationary challenges". Those would be the financial pressures greatly exacerbated by Brexit and the failure of the FSA and its parent department Defra to prepare properly. That's hardly an endorsement of FSA chief executive Emily Miles, who was head of EU exit delivery at Defra in 2019 and before then its head of "EU Exit Domestic".

Given the record of the existing system, the decision looks like a seriously false economy. The meat industry, which pays fees for the OVs' work, is certainly unimpressed by the U-turn. It has already stumped up extra to help pay for the phantom transformation, but it's stuck with the bureaucratic model in which it effectively pays for two masters. "E&J managers manage their staff, then FSA managers manage the E&J managers [and] FSA contract managers manage the E&J contract," one industry figure told the *Eye*.

The game of monopoly also continues. As *Eye* 1584 reported last month, Eville & Jones recently acquired its only meaningful potential competitor, Vorenta (trading as Hallmark). The meat industry complained to the Competition and Markets Authority, which a fortnight ago announced an investigation into the merger and ordered the companies to freeze any business merger activity (contrary to the *Eye*'s expectations, it must be said).

So the beleaguered meat industry, assailed by disease, mountainous paperwork and government incompetence, has to live with the regulatory system judged a failure just a few months ago, all while that system itself faces an expensive competition investigation. Just as well there isn't a busy period for the business coming up.

MILITARY HOUSING

Sinners from Pinnacle

THE housing management firm that has left army families in squalid conditions in their armed forces housing as a result of its "unacceptable levels of service" (*Eye* 1583) turns out to have substantial foreign ownership, including Chinese interests.

The 59,000 houses for military families were sold by the Ministry of Defence in 1996 and now ultimately belong to Terra Firma, investor Guy Hands' investment vehicle. The MoD leases them back, but under a flawed deal the MoD must maintain and repair the houses. It has long struggled to keep them in decent condition – so last year the MoD's Defence Infrastructure Organisation gave Pinnacle Group a £144m, seven-year contract to manage the housing, with maintenance contracts going to Amey and Vivo (a partnership involving Serco).

As *Eye* 1583 revealed, in September the MoD had to apologise to army families for the poor service and slow repairs they got under all these contracts.

Pinnacle's founder and chief executive, Peregrine Lloyd, is a former City fund manager who got into outsourced management of public sector housing in the 1990s. His firm relies heavily on foreign investment: Chi Wah Terrence Tsang, a Hong Kong resident Chinese national, has "significant control" of Tstar Pinnacle, the top firm in the Pinnacle Group. According to Companies House records, Tsang controls between 25 and 50 percent of the firm's shares and has had a seat on the board since August 2021. He has had "significant control" of Pinnacle since 2019, but the company only registered it this January, due to "an administrative delay".

Tsang also works for companies owned by the Chinese billionaire Kwok family, though Pinnacle says his investment with them is his own personal business. Pinnacle's second major investor is Starwood Capital, the Miami investment firm of US billionaire Barry Sternlicht.

From top: Peregrine Lloyd, Terrence Tsang, Claire Kober

The *Eye* asked the MoD if a foreign-owned firm – including ownership in China, which is not a UK ally – could be relied on to look after British troops. It did not respond. Pinnacle said it was "common practice" for a firm of its size to have shareholders who are "international investors". The firm added that only one of the five "unsatisfactory" services was its responsibility and promised it was "bringing on board additional resources to improve complaints handling times" in MoD housing.

PS: Pinnacle's managing director of homes, overseeing its army housing management, is Claire Kober – who lost her job as Labour leader of Haringey council in 2018 after trying to outsource much of the London borough's council housing to a commercial "vehicle" (*Eyes passim*).

CHURCH NEWS

Sargeant's wager

DURING 10 years as head of operations for the "two cities" part of the diocese of London from January 2009, Martin Sargeant diverted at least £5.2m of church money to fund a lifestyle that included flying to the US once or twice a month and gambling heavily. Last month he pleaded guilty to fraud and will return to court next week, when he has been told to expect a custodial sentence. A further charge of money laundering will lie on file.

Sargeant left the diocese in 2019 as part of a clear-out by the new bishop, Rt Revd Dame Sarah Mullally. His exit interview took the form of a now notorious "brain dump" in which he gave archdeacon Luke Miller nine hours of uncorroborated information about 42 London clergy (*Eye* 1553).

This shower of misinformation resulted in a flurry of unwarranted safeguarding activities. Tragically, they included a series of untrue allegations against retired priest Fr Alan Griffin, 76, who went on to take his own life.

During his career in the London diocese, Sargeant referred to himself variously as head of finance and property, or head of operations, or sometimes even clerk in holy orders (which he has never been). But as a Learning Lessons review published earlier this year noted, he was "not employed by the diocese, no personnel file appears to have been kept on him and it is difficult to understand where the role sat in terms of hierarchy and more importantly accountability".

He was able to insert himself into a chaotic and credulous diocesan structure, exercise immense patronage and syphon off big sums of money without challenge. He carved out a unique and unaccountable role as a fixer for the former bishop Richard Chartres, who left much decision-making to Sargeant. For several years, nothing much would happen in the diocese of London without his imprimatur. Sargeant had power to distribute funds and make or break careers. In a lecture in 2015, Chartres described Sargeant as a remarkable layman whose "negotiating skills and attention to detail were crucial in turning ideas into profitable ventures".

Sargeant's fraud targeted the Trust for London, a fund with an endowment of £350m, from which it makes grants to good causes. Up to £10m a year is allocated by the trust for London's City Churches grants committee for restoration projects and special appeals. Sargeant was clerk to this committee and able to distribute benefits to favoured clergy. Some went on trips to America with him; others received generous grants for their churches. He oversaw dubious money-making schemes such as the failed Museum of the Bible (*Eye* 1521).

As Sargeant awaits sentence, senior church figures are distancing themselves. The diocese of London says he wasn't on its payroll. Chartres says he didn't employ Sargeant and the City Churches grants committee was not under his control. There is no word from Sargeant's close friend the Venerable Peter Delaney, the flamboyant former archdeacon of London who brought him into the diocesan structures in the first place and chaired the grants committee during Sargeant's tenure.

The current archdeacon of London, the Venerable Luke Miller, who scribbled Sargeant's gossipy revelations in his notebook and passed them on for action (and who was at the centre of the Museum of the Bible scheme), is not even named in the Lessons Learned review.

At an earlier hearing at Westminster magistrates court, prosecutor Malachy Pakenham noted that "the level of trust put in the defendant meant he could carry on doing this over 10 years, which is quite extraordinary". But perhaps Mr Pakenham isn't familiar with the ways of the diocese of London.

DEATH UNDER RESTRAINT

Prone to error

A PARAMEDIC who witnessed five Norfolk police officers restraining a handcuffed man face down on the ground told an inquest jury he was so shocked by what he saw he immediately thought of the case of George Floyd, the black man killed just weeks earlier by police in the US while being similarly detained.

Kenneth O'Regan, of the East of England Ambulance Service, said that by the time he arrived, Krystian Kilkowski's condition was so serious that emergency critical care was required. Krystian *(pictured)* was barely conscious and turning blue, but it took a further 20 minutes before he was taken to the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital, where he later died from multi-organ failure. It was the machine operator's 32nd birthday.

Last week a jury at Norwich coroner's court decided restraint was a factor in his "drug-related death". Jurors concluded there was a serious failure to keep Krystian safe, which "contributed to his rapid physical deterioration during the restraint". All officers had received training and knew restraint on the ground should be avoided if possible. Yet Krystian was held down for a prolonged period in extreme heat, often in a prone position. The jury also found that operational failures and poor communication between police and other emergency services had led to delays in Krystian receiving "timely critical care".

Jurors had watched disturbing video footage of events after police were called to Krystian's home in Diss in August 2020. Officers were told he had been behaving strangely and had taken drugs. It later emerged he was suffering an acute behavioural disturbance triggered by amphetamines.

Obviously in a distressed mental state, Krystian is seen saying that he feared for his life and didn't want to die. When more officers arrived he fled on foot but was swiftly detained nearby. Already in handcuffs, he was taken to the ground by officers who also applied two sets of leg restraints. For more than an hour he was held mainly face down, with officers repeatedly pushing his head down towards the ground, sitting on his legs and sometimes lying over his prone body. Again in scenes similar to the detention of George Floyd, Krystian said he feared he was going to die, his level of distress increasing to such an extent that he began biting his own arms and his tongue.

Police said they detained Krystian because they had concerns about his mental health, and that he would harm himself or others. They intended to take him to a place of safety under s136 of the Mental Health Act 1983. However, at the inquest police accepted that Krystian was never told why he was being detained, nor why increasingly severe restraint was being applied.

The inquest found that Krystian died "a drug-related death following amphetamine intoxication leading to acute behavioural disturbance which was exacerbated by a period of physical activity, and further complicated by serious failures in the methods of restraint". The jury's verdict said the evidence showed that someone suffering from acute behavioural disturbance needed to exhale carbon dioxide to counter the internal acidic effects of the condition. "Krystian was unable to do this effectively due to the restriction being placed on his chest from his body position and the physical restraint of the police officers," it said.

Norfolk Constabulary said it was reviewing the case in the light of the jury's findings but insisted its officers had done everything they could to get Krystian the medical help he needed, calling the ambulance service six times. The force told the *Eye* it had referred the incident to the Independent Office for Police Conduct, which "found no disciplinary matters following their investigation".

However, Eva Roszykiewicz, solicitor for the family, said trying to shift the blame away from the officers was indicative of a problematic policing culture and a refusal to learn from similar preventable deaths. She said: "An extremely concerned and diligent jury found that there was a serious failure of the officers to keep Krystian safe, in direct conflict with their policy and training."

ALFIE BEST

Burning issue

A "DEEP-SEATED" fire on an illegal waste dump in Yorkshire has defeated experts and firefighters for more than eight weeks as they try to extinguish it and minimise health risks and environmental damage from drifting smoke.

As part of a costly operation to clear the burning waste – made more difficult because of its unknown nature and unsafe conditions – the Environment Agency (EA) is also monitoring air and water quality. Residents are being warned to keep windows closed, stay as far away as possible and to seek medical help if affected.

Rotherham's Kiveton Industrial Park, the site of this disaster, is owned by none other than zillionaire park home pariah and serial exploiter and rule breaker Alfie Best. Land registry documents show Best acquired the site in 2019, valued at £9m, through his company Best Holdings. This is the same company that rented out its protected green belt land in Surrey's North Downs for Gatwick airport car parking – without planning permission, of course (*Eye* 1575).

It appears Best may have had a similar deal in Rotherham, renting out a plot to a company called N and S Waste Carriers ltd. Its website gives the industrial park address and residents report its skips entering the park full and leaving empty. But the company has never filed accounts and faces a compulsory striking-off order. Best and N and S Carriers were both approached for a response, but no reply had arrived as the *Eye* went to press.

Long-suffering residents say there have been fires in the past at the 38-acre site, which accommodates dozens of businesses, but current problems started with a huge blaze engulfing the dump and a building on 21 September. Since then, pockets of waste keep reigniting. Local residents complain of acrid-smelling smoke and are fearful of what they are breathing in.

The EA is co-ordinating efforts from police, firefighters, the borough council and the UK Health Security Agency. It says monitoring, including testing for asbestos fibre, has so far detected no dangerous pollutants and it asks residents to "bear with us" while work continues. But after two months, patience is wearing thin and the local Conservative MP Alexander Stafford has been recruited to campaign for more resources to swiftly clear the site and make it safe.

The *Eye* was told that because the EA is looking into potential offences, it was unable to comment further. If Best and N and S Waste Carriers have been helping with inquiries, no one is saying.

DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION

Uncivil war at the DWP

EMBARRASSING times at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), which is responsible for disabled people and disability employment. It has just agreed to pay more than £500,000 compensation to settle a legal action and other claims brought by a disabled civil servant who says he suffered a mental breakdown and felt suicidal as a result of harassment, bullying and discrimination.

John Williamson worked successfully for more than 20 years as a contract manager in the DWP before a move in 2016 to a new department brought misery as colleagues failed to recognise or make allowances for his obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). They treated OCD behaviours, including neck movements and repeated hand clenching, as signs of aggression and complained about his conduct, before he was finally dismissed in 2019.

Despite evidence from Mr Williamson's GP that his work environment was exacerbating his mental distress, he says the DWP refused to make reasonable adjustments. It failed to arrange an agreed meeting to explain his condition to colleagues, did not move him to a less stressful workplace, and did not improve communication.

BULLIED: John Williamson

His GP wrote: "Workplace events were the trigger for his symptoms and led to suicidal ideations… Failure to implement the requested reasonable adjustments has in fact contributed to the deterioration of his conditions and without any doubt has affected his ability to not only attend work but to manage his symptoms whilst there."

Mr Williamson went off with work-related stress and anxiety on three occasions between 2017 and his dismissal in 2019. The department's own medical scheme adviser concluded the absences were between 50 and 70 percent caused by his employer. The absences were originally attributed on his work records to "sickness", until challenges by Mr Williamson led to amendments to "injury leave".

As a result the DWP now has to pay him monthly sums of up to 70 percent of his former salary under the civil service injury benefit scheme, until his retirement at age 68. As he is just 44, this will add up to more than £450,000. Last month, at arbitration service Acas, the DWP agreed to pay a further high-five-figure sum for discrimination. Although the department did not admit liability, the settlement brings to an end all but one of Mr Williamson's claims.

The DWP was behind the much-criticised Disability Confident employment campaign, which aimed to encourage employers to "think differently about disability and take action to improve how they recruit, retain and develop disabled people". But as Mr Williamson, a fellow of the Chartered Management Institute, pointed out: "People need to know that as well as disabled customers being treated horribly, so are staff. But most give up or settle with a confidentiality clause – so no one gets to hear about it."

TAINTED BLOOD SCANDAL

Dymond legacy

IN WHAT is being hailed as a ground-breaking inquest verdict, a coroner has ruled that haemophiliac Steve Dymond *(pictured)* died as a direct result of being given contaminated blood products.

Steve, 62, was one of thousands sentenced to chronic ill health, financial hardship and death by tainted blood products during the 1970s and 1980s – even though danger warnings had already been sounded. He was given Factor VIII, an essential blood-clotting protein, for what was relatively mild bruising after bleeds in 1976 and 1984.

Allison Summers KC, coroner for north-east Kent, said in a narrative verdict that Steve died from liver failure and cirrhosis as "the direct consequence of being given Factor VIII… which was contaminated with hepatitis C".

The ruling is expected to prompt applications from other bereaved relatives to change death certificates which only recorded the disease their loved ones suffered, like HIV and hepatitis C, plus complications, and not the original cause.

If NHS lawyers had had their way, however, Steve's death certificate may not have been so unequivocal. The coroner resisted arguments from the NHS's solicitor Jinal Shah to use the more neutral term "infected blood" because of the risk of prejudicing any future civil claims. But Ms Summers pointed out that this was not her concern as a coroner and that once produced, Factor VIII was, in her view, "contaminated".

It was in any event a curious argument. Thanks to the ongoing inquiry into what has been called the worst treatment disaster in the health service's history, interim compensation payments of £100,000 are already being paid to surviving victims and their partners, whose lives and careers were also wrecked.

The ruling was a victory for Steve's widow, Su Gorman, who as *Eye* readers may recall battled for years alongside her husband for justice. Steve died in 2018, just before the start of the inquiry for which he had fought, but his statement to the inquiry was read out at the inquest. It described how Steve was finally diagnosed with hep C in 1994 after suffering years of unexplained fatigue and "brain fog".

The coroner said Steve "suffered a variety of mental and physical symptoms which impacted upon his university education, career, marriage and ability to have children. There was little or no support available and the stigma of the virus created isolation, frustration and sadness at the loss of life imagined."

He developed cirrhosis, liver cancer and damage to the vein leading to the liver. Admitted to Margate's Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Hospital with bleeding from the damaged vein on 21 December 2018, he died two days later. The coroner said there had been a rapid deterioration in his condition between 3pm and 8.15pm but there were no medical notes for the crucial period.

Su Gorman told the *Eye* she was pleased the real cause of her husband's death had been recognised. She was, however, still struggling to come to terms with the fact that there were no medical records or test results during the last few months of his life, which might have shed light on "what perhaps could or should have been done differently".

The problem of missing, lost or deliberately destroyed records has plagued those trying to get to the truth of the disaster – including the official inquiry itself – ever since victims started falling ill and it emerged that most had been treated with blood harvested from paid, high-risk drug users and prisoners in the US.

HIGH PRINCIPALS

Dozy Birkbeck

BOSSES at Birkbeck, London's evening university, blamed "changing student demand" for the huge job cuts they have announced, but insiders say recent poor recruitment is a self-inflicted problem caused by mismanagement and previous cuts to university admin.

Staff were told in an email last month that the university would cut 84 academic and 56 administrative posts by July 2023. This would include 11 staff from the highly successful department of English, theatre and creative writing – recently ranked second-best English department in the country in the Research Excellence Framework. Significant cuts would also be made in the geography, politics, philosophy and language departments.

As Birkbeck is a relatively small institution, the cuts would mean the loss of nearly one in four teaching staff. Unions UCU and Unison, representing both the academic and support staff, have warned that the harm done by cuts will only make it harder to recruit in future, leading the university into potentially terminal "managed decline".

The announcement of the cuts has fixed the blame on struggles to recruit mature students post-Brexit and the lifting of the cap on numbers at more prestigious London universities. However, the Bloomsbury-based university has known about these risks for years and nevertheless pressed ahead with expensive building projects in central London and an ill-fated scheme to open a new base in Stratford, east London, which was transferred to the University of East London last year.

The 2021 accounts note: "Birkbeck's mature and commuter student focus is now the locus of intense competition. The imperative of responding strongly and effectively to this reality is a key part of both our longer-term strategic thinking and our immediate in-year planning."

Despite the university seeing the problems coming, departments affected by cuts are aware of many students who really wanted to start their studies this year but were let down by the admissions process. The university's already tiny and understaffed registry team and IT problems combined to result in students with places agreed on masters courses being unable to complete their enrolment.

Lecturers also say Birkbeck's 2022 poster advertising campaign, "Plan A/Plan Birkbeck", was a Gerald Ratner moment, suggesting that Birkbeck was just a "second choice" university rather than playing on its unique offering of night school teaching hours.

SECOND BEST? Birkbeck's terrible ad campaign

It remains to be seen whether presiding over a shrinking university will shrink the £386,000-a-year pay and pensions package of Birkbeck vice-chancellor Prof David Latchman.

FURTHER EDUCATION

Malvern spar

THE super-college group trying to strip Malvern of its further education opportunities has instructed lawyers to force the removal of a covenant protecting college land – potentially thwarting a local buy-back plan.

Malvern Hills College was merged into Warwickshire College Group (WCG) in 2016. Just four years later, WCG announced it was closing Malvern Hills and would be seeking "maximum value" from the site to reinvest elsewhere in its multi-site college empire. However, when the college left local authority control in 2008, the council put a covenant on the site, so it could only be used for further education purposes unless the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) said it was no longer needed.

As the LSC has since been disbanded, WCG is relying on the say-so of the Education and Skills Funding Agency that there is no functional need for a college for 16- to 19-year-olds in the area (although many youngsters have benefited from there being local vocational provision). As locals point out, much of Malvern Hills' offering covered qualifications for adults working in sectors such as social care.

Since the *Eye* last reported on Malvern last December (*Eye* 1563), a superb local effort has been made to rescue the now closed college from WCG. The campaign, led by former staff and students, set up a not-for-profit company, "Malvern Hills Arts and Community College" (MHACC). Philanthropic fund the Bransford Trust has chipped in a significant amount for MHACC to purchase the buildings, and £400,000 contributions have been put up by both the district and county councils. A formal offer to buy the college was made.

Alas, as West Worcestershire MP Harriett Baldwin told a recent Westminster Hall debate, rather than accept that offer and allow the college to "rise like a phoenix", WCG has chosen to use public money to retain lawyers to sue Malvern Hills district council to try to make it lift the covenant. With the covenant lifted, WCG could sell to housing developers and raise a higher price.

"The people of Malvern almost unanimously wish to see this wonderful college preserved," said Baldwin. "We have a plan and a business case. While this situation goes on, the site is being left to go to rack and ruin. That is in nobody's interest."

NUMBER CRUNCHING

$2.2tn Value of crypto market in April when, as chancellor, Rishi Sunak promised to 'make the UK a global hub for crypto-asset technology and investment'

$1tn Value of crypto market after largest crypto exchange, FTX, collapses in suspicious circumstances in early November

In the City

Osofsky's off

IT IS always a good idea to quit while you are ahead. So the news last week, just days after oil trader Glencore Energy was ordered to pay a record £281m after pleading guilty to bribery charges, that much-criticised Serious Farce Office director Lisa Osofsky is leaving at the end of her five-year contract next August suggests a well-timed exit.

Her departure also followed two significant convictions – David Ames for the £226m Harlequin property fraud and Timothy Schools for the £100m Axiom Legal Financing Fund scam. But the timing suggests that despite these successes Osofsky was less than certain that, if desired, she would be offered an extended or new contract – as was her predecessor David Green – given criticisms from judges, MPs and two recent reviews following embarrassing SFO failures.

There are also the potential setbacks of future trials and the never-ending Eurasian Natural Resources Corporation (ENRC) litigation. So why not leave on a high note? Especially after the justified criticisms of the past 12 months over the expensive fiascos surrounding the quashing of three Unaoil corruption convictions and the collapse of the fraud case against two Serco executives (*Eyes passim*).

FAREWELL: Lisa Osofsky

FARING WELL: Ziad Akle

The Unaoil convictions were overturned on appeal largely because of evidence withheld about dealings, first by Osofsky and then by other SFO officials, with American private investigator David Tinsley, acting for the Ahsani family, who ran the Unaoil bribe machine.

Osofsky admitted in evidence to the Commons justice committee last month that this had been a "damaging relationship". She also conceded the SFO had been "had over" by Tinsley and the Ahsanis, who had cut a plea-bargain deal with the US Department of Justice, offering information if the SFO dropped charges – which it did. Tinsley was introduced by a former FBI colleague of Osofsky. She is a dual US/UK citizen, who previously worked for the DoJ.

"It did not develop the way I had hoped it might… we did not get what we thought we might get from either David Tinsley or those individuals," Osofsky told MPs. But she placed much of the blame on former chief investigator Kevin Davis.

So far the SFO has paid £2.15m in defence costs for one defendant, Ziad Akle. The bill after the two other successful appeals is still being decided – as too are the damages and costs due to former Unaoil case controller Tom Martin for unfair dismissal after he won an employment tribunal case. The SFO sacked Martin after pressure from the DoJ and the Ahsanis. It was eager to improve relations with the DoJ.

After the excoriating appeal court comments, the then attorney-general Suella Braverman ordered a review of the Unaoil prosecution by retired judge Sir David Calvert-Smith. He concluded Osofsky had made "mistakes and misjudgments" regarding Tinsley.

The Serco case collapsed in April 2021, again after disclosure failures by the SFO. That resulted in a bill for defence costs of £2.7m. "Serious systemic failures" were identified in a subsequent report by Brian Altman KC. Against that background, renewing Osofsky's contract as director could have been a political and PR challenge even without any future legal bad news.

If it was generating money for the Treasury that decided things, Osofsky would be a shoo-in. Since 2019 the SFO has collected penalties, disgorgement payments and costs of almost £1.4bn from nine deferred prosecution agreements (DPAs) with the likes of Airbus (£833m), Amec Foster Wheeler Energy (£104m), G4S (£44m) and Serco (£23m), as well as from the convictions of Glencore Energy, Petrofac (£77m) and GPT Special Project Management (£30m). The SFO spent £68m last year.

While the SFO recouped prosecution costs of more than £33m, the rest of this bounty went to the Treasury. If the SFO were able to eat more of what it kills, perhaps its constant "lack of resources" refrain when explaining setbacks like Serco might be heard less often. More money could mean more and better-paid staff.

But the preference for DPAs – an American import taken up by Green – instead of prosecuting guilty "suits" has been another source of criticism, especially when senior executives are acquitted after their company has admitted criminality. Too often DPAs are seen as an easy option, avoiding trial risk for both sides but giving executives a get-out-of-jail card.

Whether (as the SFO has suggested) senior Glencore executives and traders could be charged will be a test before Osofsky leaves. Ironically, the DoJ is now talking about the need to prosecute more executives.

As a prosecutor Osofsky's record is mixed, even without Unaoil and Serco. It is always difficult to judge SFO directors' performance when it comes to conviction rates because of the legacies they inherit from their predecessors: the incumbent claims the credit for the legacy successes and takes the flak for the failures.

Osofsky inherited the failed Barclays prosecution, as well as Tesco and Serco – where, along with the Sarclad and Guralp cases, companies negotiated DPAs but the executives were acquitted. GPT, G4S, Amec and Petrofac also predated her arrival. Glencore, however, was Osofsky's call. Her friends at the DoJ were also on the case. Two Glencore companies will pay $1.1bn after pleading guilty to corruption and market manipulation.

Since Osofsky became director in August 2018, the SFO has prosecuted 47 defendants in 22 cases, most begun under previous directors. It convicted 16 defendants at trial (six the day after she arrived) and obtained nine guilty pleas. But 20 defendants were acquitted, while the jury could not agree in one instance and charges were dropped in another.

That means a less than impressive trial conviction rate of 42 percent, compared with a total conviction rate of 53 percent. An *Eye* review of SFO statistics in May 2021 (*Eye* 1547) indicated an overall conviction rate since 1988 of 70 percent.

Osofsky has also attracted criticism for dropping corruption cases against major corporations as not in the public interest or because of insufficient evidence for a realistic prospect of conviction – or perhaps to encourage companies to go down the DPA route. British American Tobacco, GlaxoSmithKline, De La Rue, KBR and ABB all fought the SFO and won. GSK in 2016 and KBR this year settled similar corruption cases with US authorities.

High-profile SFO investigations or prosecutions begun under Osofsky have yet to either reach court (G4S, GPT, Balli) or to result in charges – Patisserie Valerie (investigation began 2018), London Capital & Finance (2019), Sanjeev Gupta (2021). These could have a meaningful impact on Osofsky's record at the SFO.

So too will the final ENRC verdict. An investigation which began under director

Richard Alderman in 2011, was endorsed by Green in 2013 and inherited by Osofsky has still produced no charges but a ferocious "lawfare" counter-attack. This culminated in May in damaging high court findings against SFO officials, including Alderman and Mark Thompson (interim director before Osofsky), of "bad faith opportunism", "breach of duty" and lying under oath over dealings with the mining group and its former lawyers Dechert and Dechert's ex-partner Neil Gerrard (*Eye* 1574).

The SFO is estimated to have spent around £7m defending that case. Next March will see a second trial to decide what, if any, damages and costs the SFO will have to pay ENRC. A big bill for the SFO would hardly be an endorsement for Osofsky, who has overseen the case since 2018. There is also a second ENRC action. Whether Osofsky could have settled is open to question, given the ENRC mindset.

Still, like Bogart and Bergman in *Casablanca* would always have Paris, so Lisa Osofsky will always have Glencore.

Fails from the crypto

THE $10bn to $50bn owed by failed cryptocurrency exchange FTX could become another of those unexpected "shadow banking" shocks to the financial system, like the recent pension fund turmoil from liability-driven investment, that post-2008 regulators fear. Losses on this scale in an unregulated financial sector have a nasty way of spreading like a toxic stain, infecting seemingly unrelated or unconnected institutions or individuals.

BURNT: Sam Bankman-Fried

FOMO-driven private equity, hedge funds, sovereign wealth funds, pension funds, and asset managers all bought into FTX and its 30-year-old, shorts-loving founder, Sam Bankman-Fried. So it is not just crypto bro traders who have lost out as his $32bn empire evaporated last week.

FTX claims to have assets similar to its range of liabilities, but while asset values often shrink in a bankruptcy, debts usually retain their number. This means there is certain to be a big hole where FTX used to be, and that means losses for those with funds locked up there or owed money by related companies – losses that can spread to those who lent to FTX losers.

Then there is the knock-on effect on other crypto players. Already the once booming cryptocurrency world has been hit this year by previous failures: Celsius Network and Voyager Digital. Bitcoin is at a two-year low, down from an all-time peak of $69,000 a year ago to $16,500.

No wonder Changpeng Zhao, the chief executive of biggest exchange Binance who walked away from a rescue bid for FTX, says this could be like 2008 for the crypto world. The question is what now happens in that wider world of old money?

More Slicker over ☞

Bank accounting

BACK in September, *Private Eye* asked the Bank of England how much the joint investigation since 2016 by its Prudential Regulation Authority and the Fundamentally Complicit Authority into former HBOS directors and senior managers had cost, to arrive at a decision that there was nothing to see. The Bank declined to provide a figure, so questions were submitted under the Freedom of Information Act seeking that information.

Clearly working in tandem, the Bank first answered a different question while the FCA waited the full statutory 20 days to clarify the request. Finally, the information was provided last Friday.

The Bank put the combined cost at £7,238,000, with £2,711,000 going to outside lawyers, accountants and others. The PRA's share was put at £4,135,000, including £2,723,000 reimbursed to the FCA. The FCA put its costs at £3,103,000.

No doubt former HBOS chairman Lord Stevenson and ex-CEO Andy Hornby may disagree, but this would be money – £4,135,0000 from taxpayers – well spent only if the PRA/FCA findings are now published.

Hands down

ADMINISTRATOR FRP Advisory's latest report on collapsed funeral plan provider Safe Hands Plans reveals that expected recovery for the 46,000 plan holders has shrunk to at best £10.5m but maybe only £6.45m from their £70m payments – between 9p and 15p in the pound. The initial estimate in May was £10.6m to £16.1m.

The report reveals that £9m went into two companies linked to director Duncan Webster which have been put into creditors' voluntary liquidation. He joined the board in February; the company collapsed a month later.

Money from the supposedly ringfenced Safe Hands Trust went, via Mauritius-based fund manager Interactive Advisers, into preference shares in Illyrian Power (£4.8m) and bonds issued by Silk Alternative Finance (£4.2m). Interactive was appointed by trustee Sterling Trust Company, run by a former business associate of Safe Hands Plans owner Richard Wells. FRP says it is investigating why Interactive was appointed. Before Wells took over the trust funds were managed by Swiss bank UBS with a recognised independent trustee in place.

The bulk of the trust funds – £46m – were managed by TJM Partnership, a broker already under FCA investigation. It collapsed last December after being fined £2m. The TJM-managed funds mostly went into the now illiquid and impaired Navigator Global funds in the Cayman Islands, run from Northern Ireland by trader Joe Kelly. They in turn invested £30m with Wells companies. Little is expected to be recovered.

Illyrian Power invested in a Slovenian renewable energy company. It also received £3.7m from the Navigator Global funds. Little is expected back. Silk loaned £1m to Pine Developments, developing a former Pontins holiday camp. Pine had already received £11m from the funds invested with Navigator Global. It is likely to pay back less than 1p in the pound. Silk also loaned £2m to Fenchurch Legal, a litigation funder owned by Wells. Recoveries from Silk are put at £425,000.

While the return for plan holders is shrinking, fees for FRP and lawyers Pinsent Masons are expanding. The latest report shows that FRP's remuneration to August was £803,000 and legal fees were £324,000.

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 741

by Cyclops

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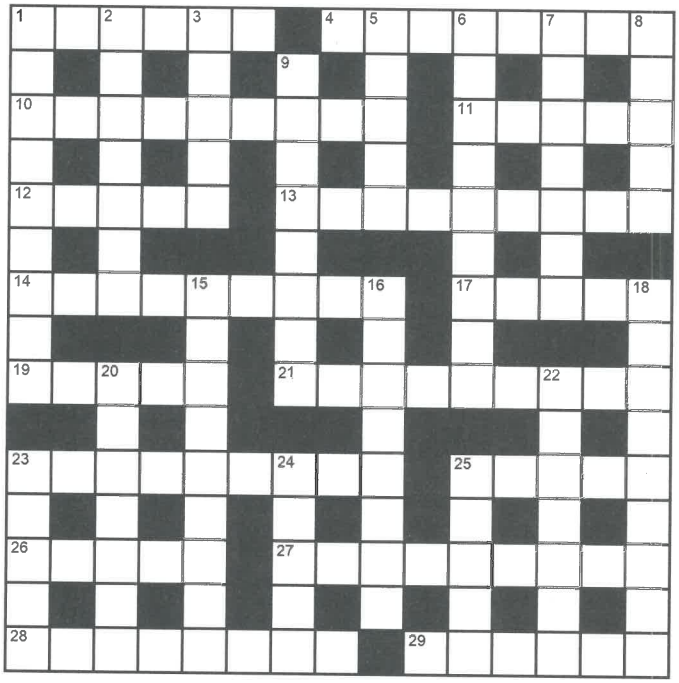


ACROSS

1 State accomplice almost makes president (6)
4 Engaged in a close fight – good way to trap a tech multinational (8)
10 Popular western female gate-crashing Melody's version of karaoke? (9)
11/22 Heeding the call as a one-time News International employee? (5,7)
12/20 A homely, muted broadcast – typical sort of MP's response to questioning? (5-7)
13 Satisfied with shift of ceremonial wear? (4-5)
14 Scepticism about Biden's file (name removed) (9)
17 Dodgy type grabbing good land (5)
19 Despot's caught dead short presenting management (5)
21 Perhaps arch-like independent needs to break ex-President Henry (9)
23 End of Truss: being part of a circus and floundering? (9)
25 Scottish smoker holding back company's deputy (5)
26 Mother and daughter involved in greeting former insurrectionary leader (5)
27 Access offered by a Democrat on assignment (9)
28 Descent of Digger, some money lost, involved in leak (8)
29 Rough Conservative newspaper, generally discontented (6)

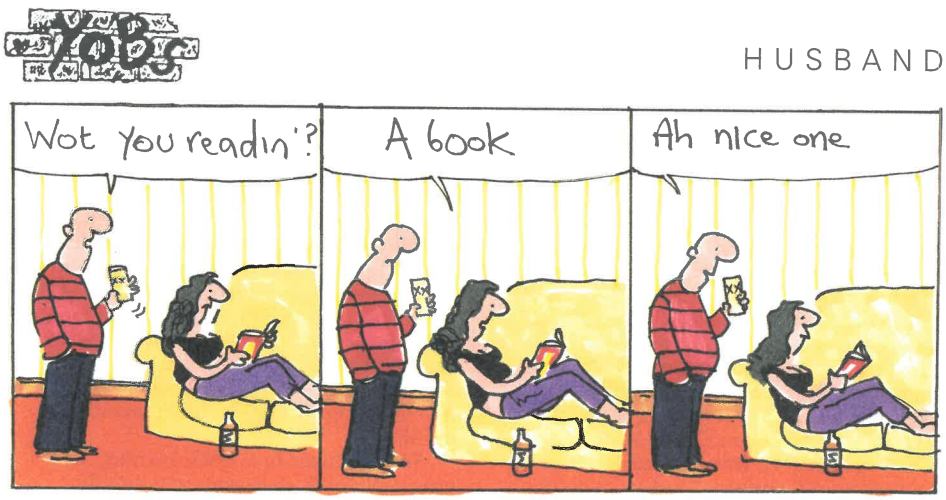
DOWN

1 The press etc, providing service aimed to reform (4,5)
2 Try to get elected, having material on socialist leader (7)
3 Egg producer: "Love to diversify!" (5)
5 It's grand coming into money, like Brian (5)
6 Fraudulent MP repaid income, finally? A hopeless fancy! (4,5)
7 Yells out (balls having been grabbed) in a vague way (7)
8 Force university to leave outfit (5)
9 Disagreement – politician cut short and lightly struck by the sound of it (8)
15 Creating Lords members? None to be arranged before show of wealth (9)
16 Light bridge possibly is legitimate target (4,4)
18 Discuss cost of Tony's involvement with leak about Saddam's end (4,5)
20 See 12ac.
22 See 11ac.
23 To conclude: half of EU's in depression (3,2)
24 Maggie – no good turning into an icon (5)
25 Nearer (having lost head) what Trump denies he was (5)

Crossword 740 winner: MARTIN & JENNIFER WRIGHT

ACROSS: 1 Up-tempo 5 Effort 10 Annexation 12 Chip in 13 Skylight 14 Mugs game 16 Skimpy 18 Remark 19 Sidestep 20 Stalwart 23 Carpet 25 Ulna 26 Plebiscite 27 Poking 28 Measure.

DOWN: 2 Penthouse 3 Eye up 4 Plain talk 6/11 Fancy free 7 Off limits 8 Teeth 9 Tissue 15 Small talk 16 Seductive 17 Presenter 19 Setter 21 Tulip 22 Aspen 24 Races.



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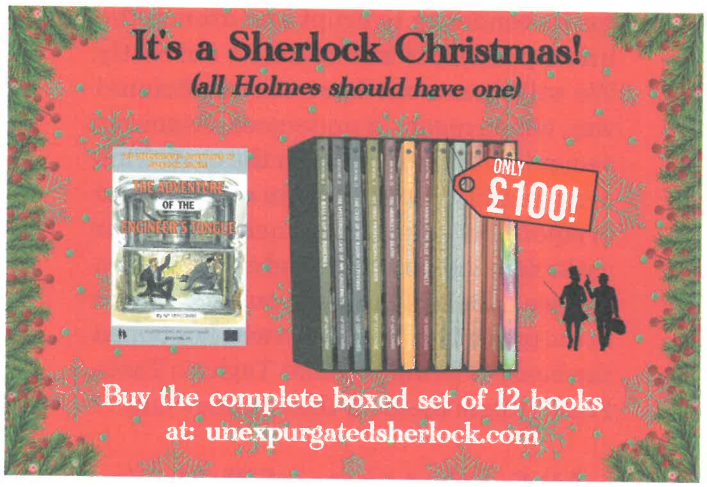
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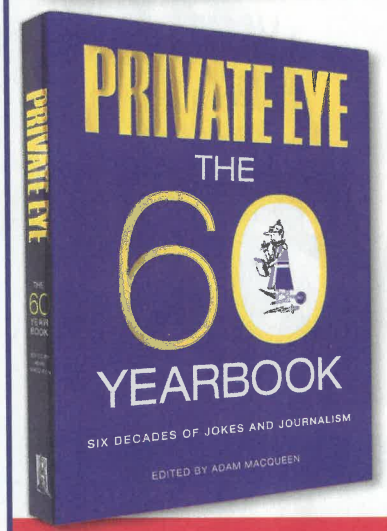

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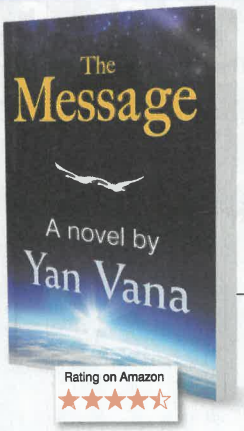

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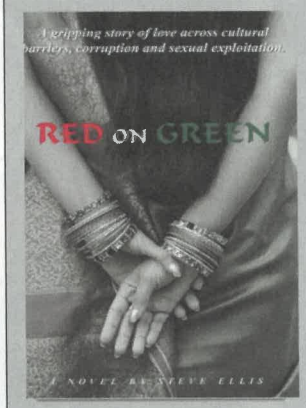

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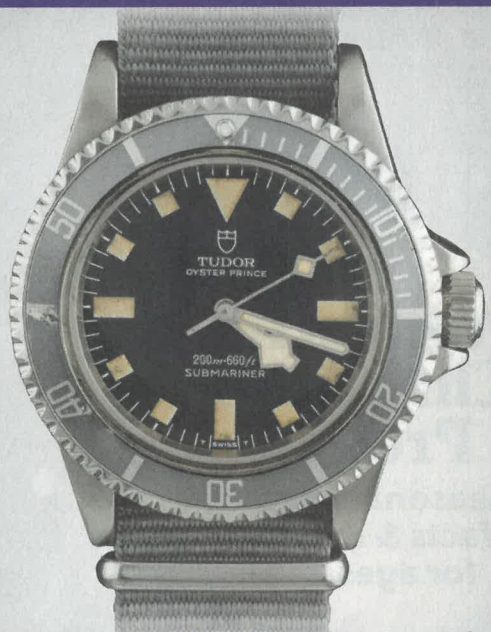

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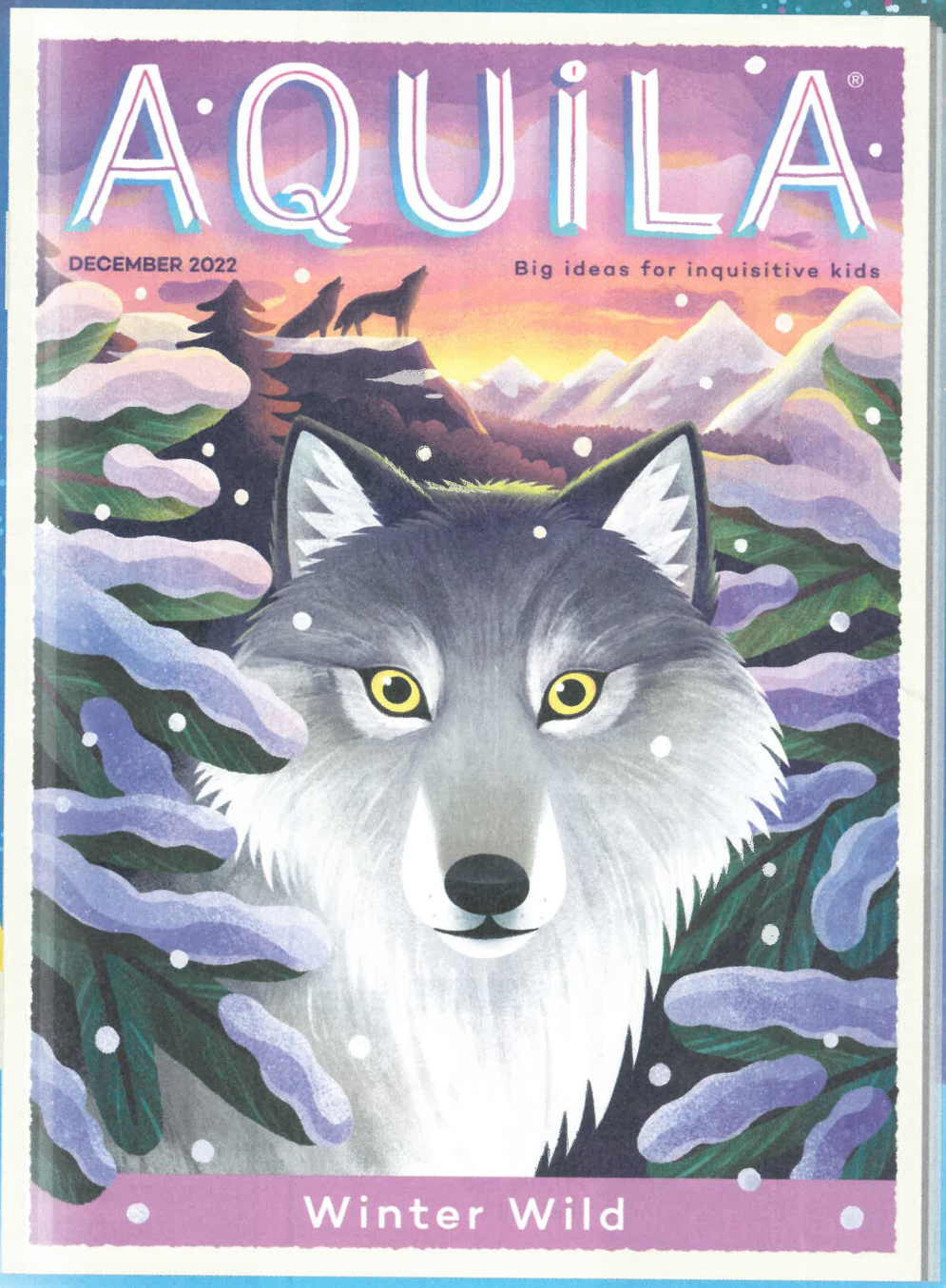

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[1] The Children's Commissioner's 2019 childhood vulnerability report.
[2] The hidden truth about homelessness report, CRESR.

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